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THE INDEPENDENT

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER 1996

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look

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better rich
than read PAGE 13

The Commons: now it gets dirty

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Guerrilla warfare in the Commons was declared by Labour and the Liberal Democrats last night after Government whips were caught red-handed cheating in Monday night's crucial fisheries vote.

Having lost its overall majority, the Government now faces a New Year of attrition from an Opposition that is united in outrage at Government deceit.

In a warning of the campaign to come, the Labour Chief Whip, Donald Dewar, said the Opposition parties would now be "raising the signposts" and setting up ambushes to trap and wear down the Government.

The Commons crisis broke over the result of the first of two fisheries votes on Monday night, when an Opposition attack was defeated by an 11-vote majority for the Government.

In the run-up to that vote, regarded as a cliff-hanger test of the Government's ability to win after Labour's victory in the Barnsley East by-election, whips on both sides of the House began making arrangements last Thursday to "pair" sick and absent MPs.

Pairing is a tried and tested parliamentary tradition, which allows Ministers and MPs to go abroad, and MPs to remain in their sick-beds, without having to dash back to Westminster for important votes.

In the run-up to the fisheries vote, Labour had four MPs it wanted to pair; the Liberal Democrats had three - a total of seven.

But in a double-dealing exercise that left the two Opposition parties aghast when it emerged yesterday in the aftermath of the vote, the Government's pairing whip, Derek Conway, gave Labour and the Liberal Democrats just four names -

pairing three Tories with six Opposition MPs.

That duplicity emerged in the early hours of yesterday when whips combed through the division lists, looking for an explanation for the Government's larger-than-expected majority.

With the nine Ulster Unionists abstaining, the Government should have won by eight votes. If the Unionists had voted against the Government, it would have lost by one, because dissident backbencher Sir John Gort abstained as part of his protest against the threatened closure of a local hospital casualty unit. Clearly anticipating the risk of defeat, Mr Conway tricked Labour and the Liberal Democrats to save the day for the Government.

Yesterday, both Mr Dewar and the Liberal Democrat Whip, Archie Kirkwood, demanded an immediate explanation from the urbane Alastair Goodlad, the Tory Chief Whip.

No explanation was provided at that meeting, so the two Opposition parties agreed on a spontaneous protest - withdrawing all pairing arrangements from 18 January, when the Commons returns from its Christmas break.

But then, in briefings from the Government Whip's office, journalists were told that the Opposition were "bad losers": no pairing agreements had been broken; and the last time pairing arrangements were withdrawn, in 1993, the Government majority went up.

"It's a good thing for us, from now to May," one senior Tory whip said.

The Government whips' office compounded the felony, saying it did not do deals with the Liberal Democrats - effectively calling Mr Kirkwood a liar.

When the unofficial Conservative reply was relayed to Mr Dewar, one of the calmest characters in the Commons, he was incandescent with anger. A Labour whip said later: "We are now scraping people off the wall down here."

The Labour source said it was now entirely possible that all behind-the-scenes deals between the two front benches would be broken off.

Earlier, in a joint statement, Mr Dewar and Mr Kirkwood had said: "The pairing system is built on trust. If trust is destroyed, the system is unworkable."

"To offer the same pairs to Labour and Liberal Democrats in a key vote is conduct that cannot be overlooked or excused. It smacks of deceit and dishonesty."

One Tory backbencher said last night that the affair confirmed what he had always believed, that "one Tory is worth two Opposition MPs any day".

Labour plans March Budget

Labour's shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown, has announced that the party will publish its March Budget, which will set out its plans for the next financial year.

Mr Brown said that the Budget would be published in March, and would set out Labour's plans for the next financial year, including its plans for the economy, the environment, and social issues.

He said that the Budget would be a "blueprint" for Labour's policies, and would set out the party's vision for the future of the country.

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Six aid staff killed in cold blood

Phil Reeves
Moscow
Christopher Bellamy
London

The Red Cross pulled all but a handful of its western staff out of Chechnya yesterday after masked killers shot dead six foreign aid workers - including five women nurses - in the bloodiest attack on the humanitarian agency in its 130-year history.

The murders, cold-bloodedly carried out while the victims slept in their beds, are the worst ever violation of the frequently abused neutrality under which Red Cross staff have staked their lives to help victims of countless wars.

They sent a wave of shock and revulsion around aid agencies, deepening their alarm over the growing evidence that their rights are being treated with contempt in conflict zones, and that their workers - often young western professionals - are increasingly at risk.

"There is a dramatic trend in which there is no respect for the Red Cross or other agencies," said Thierry Meyrat, head of delegation for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Moscow. They were being compelled to adopt a more military style, increasing the risk of being made a target.

Other international agencies were also discussing plans to withdraw from the Caucasian republic, at least until the killers were found. Their crime had the hallmarks of a carefully planned operation: Mr Meyrat said the assassins had used guns equipped with silencers.

It happened at around 4am yesterday, when masked men broke into a hospital, a clearly marked Red Cross centre, which sits at the bottom of a hill at the entrance to the small Chechen town of Novye Atagi, 11 miles south-west of Grozny. They broke down bedroom doors, and shot their victims in bed.

The hospital employs 15 expatriates, and 180 locals. None of the latter was hurt, although a foreign worker was injured.

The murdered aid workers were a Dutch architect and nurses from New Zealand, Canada, Spain and Norway. They had been working at the hospital since September, when it was set up, using funds from the Norwegian Red Cross, specially to care for victims of Chechnya's 21-month war.

Although the motive remains uncertain, aid sources were sure it was political. They pointed out that the assassinations looked suspiciously like a calculated attempt to disrupt the republic's elections on 27 January.

Chaos returns, page 7



Cult figure: The image of St David in Cardiff city hall. Bones found in a casket could be the relics of Wales' patron saint Photograph: Rob Stratton

We've poisoned soya beans, say bio-sabs

Charles Arthur and
Nicholas Schoon

Technicians were last night urgently inspecting tanks of soya at a Liverpool processing plant, after bio-saboteurs claimed to have poisoned them in a protest against non-labelling of genetically engineered food.

The break-in, which took place at the plant, owned by Cargill, on Monday night, is the first time that environmental activists in Britain have said they have purposely contaminated a food component in order to stop its use. An unsigned notice delivered to *The Independent* yesterday said that "the contaminant is hazardous and can cause serious long-term problems." The contaminant was not specified.

Soya oil is used in the manufacture of a huge range of foods, including biscuits, bread, pizza, margarine and pastries. Cargill is one of the largest manufacturers in the UK, producing the oil from imported soya beans.

A company spokeswoman



group, follows the harvest and import from the US earlier this year of soya beans which have been genetically engineered to resist a herbicide. US exporters refused to separate them from normal soya beans, meaning that food made using those beans could not be labelled as "genetically modified". Supermarkets and retailers condemned the decision, and some European countries called for a boycott of US produce.

Greenpeace spokesman Adam Wolf said: "It certainly wasn't us who did this. It is part of our culture never to do things anonymously - we exist to bear witness." Three weeks ago, Greenpeace activists tried but failed to stop a cargo ship from unloading the first consignment of 56,000 tonnes of soya beans, including genetically modified ones, to reach Britain from the US.

Bob Baehr, of the more militant Earth First!, said last night: "Personally I think this is a great thing and I'd shake the hand of whoever did it."

QUICKLY

Victory for Saunders
The former Guinness chairman Ernest Saunders won a significant victory when a European court ruled that this trial for fraud represented a breach of his human rights. The Serious Fraud Office pledged to oppose strongly any attempt to get his convictions quashed. Page 2

Asylum laws killed
European leaders have quickly agreed to write off 40 years of human rights laws, by proposing that European citizens should no longer have the right to claim asylum in another member state of the EU. Human rights groups have reacted with anger. Pages 9 & 11

Barings criticism
A committee of MPs severely criticised the auditors Coopers & Lybrand, the Securities and Futures Authority and the Bank of England for failing to detect deficiencies in the management of Barings bank ahead of its £800m crash. Page 14

Mansell says no
Nigel Mansell has decided against making a return to Formula One with Jordan-Peugeot next season. He said he did not have enough time for the job. Page 22

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St David's bones put to test of time

Roger Dobson

Bones found in a casket at St David's Cathedral in Wales are being tested to see if they could be the relics of the principality's patron saint.

Tiny slivers of bone have been taken for examination and dating at Oxford University's radio-carbon accelerator unit, using techniques similar to those applied to the Turin Shroud.

The bones were found by 19th century workmen with other relics in a 4th casket but have not been scientifically tested before.

The Rt Rev Huw Jones, the Bishop of St David's and the 126th incumbent since the saint, said yesterday he was excited at the possibility of linking the remains to his predecessor, who died in 601, was canonised in 1120 and whose relics disappeared in 1538. "In the 16th century there was a determined effort to break up the cult of St David and the official shrine and relics disappeared," he said. "Until then pilgrimages here had a high profile. Three pilgrimages to St David's were the equivalent of one to Jerusalem and two were the equivalent of one trip to Rome."

The casket was found hidden in the walls of the cathedral, at St David's in west Wales. Inside were the bones of three people, including long leg and thigh bones that have been linked by some to St David.

The tests will establish if the bones are from the same period as the saint, whose name lingers on in scores of Welsh villages called Llandewi.



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news

Seasonal scatology and humbug in the House

The Tories are tetchy. Labour's tetchy. I'm tetchy. It's that time of year when preparing to be happy is driving us all mad. Only the Ulster Unionists are unaffected by the season - and that's because they are always tetchy.



You stagger into the House, Christmas lunch congealing in your digestive system

Jones was - this will be Rhodri Morgan (Lab. Cardiff West) wanting to know about "faecal streptococci" (or poo, as we English call it) in Welsh seawater. Now, this was the last thing that the fastidious Mr Jones wanted to talk about, and he replied thus: "The honourable gentleman reveals in undermining the British tourist industry!" Mr Morgan's colleagues (like me) presumably believe that it is the faecal streptococci that do the undermining: a swimmer finding herself face to face with drifting ordure will not blame Rhodri Morgan for having brought it to her attention. So Michael Meacher (remember him? He's in the shadow cabinet) pointed out that - this year - 47 beaches were found to be below stan-

dard - some chronically - an increase over 1995. The bearded Mr Jones (who by now had completely forgotten that the ostensible purpose of ministerial question-time is for him to be asked questions and then to answer them) told Mr Meacher all about the "last Labour government, of which he was a particularly distinguished member". Maybe. But whenever I see shit in the water, I shall always think of Mr Jones.

This scatological theme spilled over (so to speak) into Prime Minister's Questions. Maria Fyfe (Lab. Glasgow Maryhill) kicked off with a question in Gaelic (I think) in which the only words that I could make out were "restricted incontinence pads to two per person". (I know that such pads

are not funny and that one day I shall be grateful for them etc. But following on from the streptococci and Christmas dinner, it was all getting to me). Mr Major is more gracious than his junior colleague, and forebore from accusing Ms Fyfe of talking down the British sanitary industry. Instead he reminded everyone of the 70 improvements in primary health care announced that very day.

It only remained for Tony Blair to wish the Prime Minister a Happy Christmas - which he did in his own inimitable way by asking for the umpteenth time about the BSE crisis. Most of us in the gallery have only to hear the words "What is the date by which..." before we groan with boredom, run our arthritic fingers through our

thinning locks, and wonder how on earth we are going to survive about this yet again. One discovers from JM that there is no timetable for the BSE inquiry to be lifted, and then reminds him that - back in March 1996 - it would all be over by Christmas. Which is very, very boring of Mr Blair. And yet if anyone examines Hansard for the 21st May - the day on which Mr Major declared the Second and Tallow War officially open - they will discover what the PM secretly knows: that this exercise in foreigner-baiting, blame-shifting, banner-waving and back-covering was both discreditable and (inevitably) futile. Only when he admits it should be allowed off the book Harrumph.

significant shorts

E. coli death toll continues to rise

The Scottish E. coli food poisoning outbreak is now the second-worst on record with the death of its 13th victim.

The Forth Valley Health Board last night confirmed that a "frail and very elderly" woman resident at Banknew Nursing Home, Banknew, had died of the infection this afternoon.

No details of the woman were given, but she was being cared for at the home where her condition had been giving staff cause for concern for several days.

The woman is the third pensioner at the home to have died of E. coli 0157 since the outbreak began. So far, five pensioners, one man and four women, have died in Forth Valley. Health officials have established a link between the E. coli cases at the home and cooked meat bought from a Bonnybridge shop supplied by Wishaw butcher John M Barr & Son.

Rape charge soldiers home for Christmas

Six Army officers accused of rape will be at home for Christmas after they were released on bail by a judge yesterday.

The six, freed by Judge Paul Clark at Oxford Crown Court, are due to be released from Bullingdon prison. They had been held there on remand charged with raping the woman between May 27 and 28 this year.

The accused men, all serving with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, were released on condition that they did not contact any prosecution witnesses, reside where instructed by the Army while on duty, and at their home addresses while on leave.

No Lockerbie service after Dunblane

Relatives of British victims of the Lockerbie air disaster have decided against holding their customary memorial service in London this year.

Sympathy for the plight of the families bereaved in Dunblane - and a wish not to deflect attention from that massacre - was given as one of the reasons. It will be the first time in eight years that the Lockerbie disaster has gone unmarked by a pre-Christmas service in London.

Leah Betts: no verdict reached

The jury in the case of Steven Packman, who was accused of buying the ecstasy tablet which killed Leah Betts in November 1995, was discharged yesterday after failing to reach a verdict.

The prosecution now has three days to decide whether it will seek a re-trial in the case. Steven Packman, 18, of Poind Lane, Laidon, Essex, denied being concerned with the supply of the drug to Leah and her friend Sarah Cargill.

The judge at Norwich Crown Court, Mr Justice Kay, told the jury of six men and six women: "It has been obvious to me that you all paid close attention throughout the case. It is not your fault that at the end of the day you reached different views." *Louise Jury*

Bankers vote for walkout

Staff at 3,000 Lloyds-TSB branches have voted for a festive half-day walkout on Christmas Eve in protest at management's decision to stay open until 4.30pm. Their colleagues at NatWest however voted narrowly to keep working despite the company's decision to make them work normal hours.

John Townsend, assistant secretary at the Banking Insurance and Finance Union, said the decision by Lloyds staff was made in defence of "family values and the right to a decent break at Christmas".

He added that there had been no great clamour from customers to keep branches open late and his members would be walking out at 12.30pm. Cash dispensers would be filled before staff leave. *Barrie Clement*

Aliens leave no claims bonus untouched

An insurance company which will pay £1 million this week to a man who took out a policy against being abducted by aliens, says it intends to make a profit by selling the evidence for the claim.

The insurer, Goodfellow Rebecca Ingrams Pearson Ltd, said it was negotiating with a US media group which is willing to pay more than £1 million for physical evidence including photographic footage provided by Joseph Carpenter, who says he was abducted by aliens near Swindon in October.

Mr Carpenter insisted yesterday that his claim was not a hoax, and his insurers said "We do not just pay out £1 million like that".

UK red-faced as Saunders wins

European Court says Guinness boss convicted over Distillers battle was tried unfairly

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

The Serious Fraud Office yesterday pledged strongly to oppose any attempt by the former Guinness chief Ernest Saunders to get his fraud convictions quashed after the European Court of Human Rights ruled his trial had been unfair.

The Strasbourg judges said the prosecution's use of transcripts of interviews obtained under compulsion by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors investigating the 1986 Guinness takeover of Distillers broke Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which guarantees a right to a fair trial. Use of incriminating interviews was a "marked departure" from one of the basic principles of fair procedure.

While Britain's judge, Sir John Freeland, endorsed the judgment, the ruling is still a serious embarrassment to the Government, which sought to urge the court to interfere less in UK affairs and which had wanted finally to close the door on the Guinness scandal.

Instead, the ruling has opened the way for Mr Saunders to ask the new Criminal Cases Review Commission to consider sending his case back to the Court of Appeal for what would be the third time.

The inspectors' report into the affair is also expected to be published. SFO investigative powers are less draconian than those available to DTI inspectors under the 1985 Companies Act. But yesterday's decision could have far-reaching ramifications for other City legislation, including the 1986 Financial Services Act, which regulates investment businesses and likewise obliges witnesses to answer



Cause célèbre: Mr Saunders savouring yesterday's decision. He may try again to have his convictions quashed

questions on pain of imprisonment, and some insolvency powers. Mr Saunders was one of four convicted over an illegal share-support operation which secretly paid out £25m in "success fees" and commissions in return for help in boosting the Guinness share price in the £2.7bn battle for Distillers against the Argyll Group.

Statements obtained by the inspectors, David Donaldson QC and Ian Watt, were to form the cornerstone of the prosecutions for false accounting, theft and conspiracy and were

used, the court said, to cast doubt on Mr Saunders' honesty and establish his involvement. Exactly 10 years after the investigation began, a specially convened Grand Chamber of 20 judges ruled 16-4 that Article 6 protected the right to silence and the right of an individual not to incriminate himself. Whether or not the answers to the inspectors were directly incriminating, they had been used "in a manner which sought to incriminate" and it was no defence for the Government to invoke the public interest in

investigating and punishing those responsible for complex corporate fraud.

There was some consolation for the Government, as the court rejected claims by Mr Saunders of £3.6m in lost earnings and £1m for "anxiety, anguish and imprisonment". They also cut his claim for legal costs and expenses from £336,360 to £75,000 after ruling the bulk of the fees, including those of Mr Saunders' unqualified advisers, George Devlin and his wife, had been unnecessarily incurred or were unreasonable. Mr Saunders, who can now command £800 a day as a business consultant, told a news conference he would have been acquitted if the evidence now discredited by the Strasbourg court had been ruled inadmissible, saying he now felt "innocent".

The Court of Appeal has twice before rejected his challenges to his convictions, although on the first occasion it halved his jail sentence in the light of medical reports suspecting the early stages of some form of Alzheimer-type disease. The DTI and SFO seized

on the fact that the court declined to speculate on whether the outcome of the trial would have been different had the transcripts not been used.

Human rights experts welcomed the ruling but expressed reservations in government circles yesterday was such that the Tory Euro-sceptic, Sir Ivan Lawrence, chairman of the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, declared himself in favour of incorporating the European convention into British law so that cases could be decided by British courts.

Unions urge block on £500m pension windfall

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

Rail unions have called on the pensions ombudsman to stop a £500m rail pensions surplus being distributed to private rail companies.

The move came yesterday as the Government faced the prospect of having to pay back £188m taken from the pension fund of bus workers just before privatisation of the National Bus Company in 1990.

retary of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) said yesterday that the unions would try any way possible to prevent the privatised rail companies from benefiting from the surplus.

He said: "They stand to make a small jackpot out of these funds and yet they contributed nothing towards them."

The move by the unions came after Sir George Young, the Secretary of State for Transport, reacting to *The Independent's* revelation about the

windfall yesterday defended the right of companies to claim these surpluses.

He told BBC Radio 4's 7-day programme: "It is perfectly in order for any surplus to be shared between members and employers."

The Pensions Ombudsman has already found in favour of National Grid and National Bus Company pensioners in their efforts to reclaim surpluses which ended up in company or government coffers.

Yesterday, National Bus Company pensioners delivered a "Scrooge" Christmas card to the Department of Transport to press their case to recover £168m appropriated by the Government after the privatisation of the company.

In September, the Pensions Ombudsman ruled that the Government had no right to the money from the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust, and told the pension-fund trustees to take all practical steps to recover the money from the Department of Transport.

Eddie Wignall, a former bus driver from Barnsley, said: "Some pensioners are getting £20 a week less because the money was taken."

"The surplus should have gone to the employees," he added.

Until this week, the two trustees were junior civil servants who, according to the union, were reluctant to take action against their own department.

However, the department has now decided to replace

the trustees with the official solicitor and, in a separate move, the union has been told that it can begin a legal action against the trust if it does not comply with the Ombudsman's ruling.

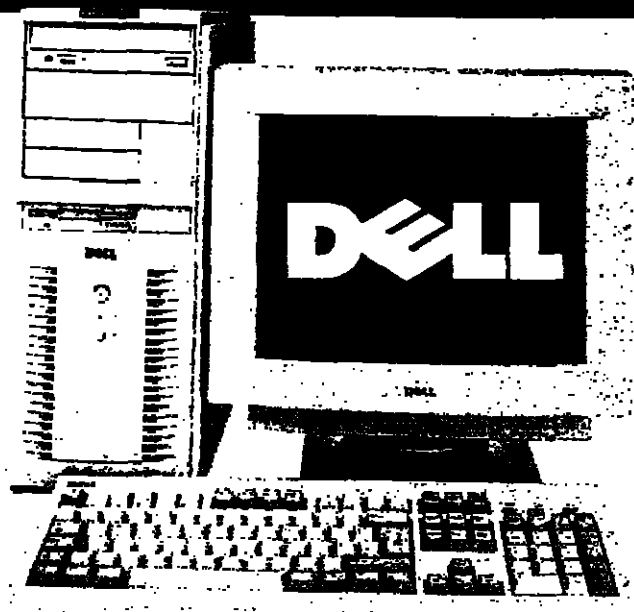
Two weeks ago, the Pensions Ombudsman ruled that the National Grid should repay the £44m it took from the pensions fund after privatisation, opening the possibility that a total of £500m may have to be paid back by privatised electricity companies.

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Transplant miracle that helps disabled children take hold of their dreams

Susan Emmett

A pioneering technique to help children without fingers by removing a toe and grafting it on to the hand was hailed as a success in a report published yesterday by the British Society for Surgery of the Hand.

This complex and rare operation, previously thought suitable only for adults who had lost a digit, was successfully carried out on 40 children between the age of nine months and 14 years at St James's University Hospital, Leeds.

At first, doctors were unsure whether the technique could be used on children born with hand abnormalities, as they might not have the necessary tendons in their hands to graft on a new digit. Children's blood vessels were also believed to be too small for such an operation. But 35 of the 40 children who underwent surgery between 1988 and 1994 were born with hand deformities. Five had hand injuries.

The result may not be perfect hands - the transferred toes still look like toes - but with time and further surgery, children are able to use the new digits as

fingers. Depending on the degree of deformity at the start, the operation will restore a child's ability to pinch, grasp or squeeze.

A follow-up study showed that over 90 per cent were able to grip paper and Lego blocks, pull Lego blocks apart and twist jar lids on and off.

One patient, 10-year-old Stacey Carter-Brooks, from York, was even able to realise her dream of playing the piano after surgery to her right hand.

"I know it is not a cosmetic hand," said Mr Simon Kay, consultant plastic surgeon at St James's University Hospital. "But it's an extremely functional hand. You have to be clear about the goals of surgery, whether restoring function or appearance. Both of the cases are very important. Hands are on view the whole time, like a face. You speak with your hands."

Having made the new digit function, Mr Kay works on restoring feeling and flexibility to the 'finger' and revising its appearance. A year after the initial graft, the pulp under the toes is removed to make them less bumpy and more finger-like.



Stacey Carter-Brooks (above) plays the piano for her mother. The ground-breaking surgery, in which toes are transferred to the hand, (below left) can give a remarkable increase in the prehensile function of the hand (below right)



In some cases, the tendons and joints are loosened to allow greater movement, and the new finger becomes stronger with time.

Nearly every child thought the appearance of their hands had improved, and 71 per cent

said that they used their new digits almost all the time. In none of the cases was there any negative impact on the child's happiness, confidence or self-consciousness.

Only 34 per cent experienced teasing, but this was thought to

relate to the hand deformity in general and not the toe transplant. The effect of removing a toe from a healthy foot was also less drastic than expected, as its absence is not glaring and scarring is limited.

According to the report, the

best time for this type of surgery is at the age of two, when the child can get over the experience of going to hospital more quickly.

Experts are not sure how many children are born with hand abnormalities, and not all

sufferers are suitable for this treatment, which is still very rare. So far, only around 100 toe to hand operations have been carried out since the early Seventies. The first such operation was conducted on an adult in 1968.

Labour goes crackers over pay disgrace

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

Homeworkers in Britain are paid between 1p and 2p for making a Christmas cracker which sell in the shops for anything up to £2.50.

Boots the chemist is supplied by women working at home as "sub-contractors" who earn just over 2p, while workers who are contracted to Fine Art Developments, which supply many high street retailers, receive around 1.5p. The National Group on Homeworking estimates that some people are paid considerably less than 1p.

Ian McCartney, Labour's chief employment spokesman, said the wage rates were not high enough to be portrayed as poverty wages. "This is slave labour," he said. "Scrooge simply isn't a character in Dickens, the tragedy is that he actually exists. The pay of homeworkers is a disgrace. I wonder how many people who are buying their Christmas crackers in high street stores realise how little the people who are making them are paid."

Mr McCartney said that under a Labour government a statutory national minimum wage would include homeworkers for whom pay is difficult to police.

Denise McKenna, acting co-ordinator of the National Group on Homeworking, said the amount of money paid to workers who supplied Boots was at the top of the range. "Many are paid far less. One company pays £8 for 1,000 Christmas crackers. If you are desperate for money you will work for virtually nothing," she said.

A spokeswoman for Boots pointed out that the retail price included materials, transport and retail costs. In a letter to Mr McCartney from Jayne Mayled, head of customer services at the company, she insisted that the flexibility offered to workers was often very attractive to those with family responsibilities.

"This method of working is particularly suitable for the domestic arrangements of a number of people as it provides them with an opportunity to earn money whilst continuing to look after their families at home and without the necessity to travel to and from a workplace."

Homeworkers making Boots crackers are supplied with a "kit" of components necessary to produce a batch of 1,800 crackers, for which they are paid between £38.80 to £49.60.

She said typical earnings per week ranged from £25 to £166 with one worker earning £221. However, it should be emphasised that each homeworker could determine the amount of work he or she wished to undertake and therefore also the consequent remuneration.

A spokesman for Fine Art Developments said trials had shown that homeworkers were capable of earning £6 an hour.

Card sellers show little charity

Jojo Moyes

Record amounts are being spent on charity Christmas cards, with many buyers apparently not realising that their chosen charity may receive less than 2 per cent of the sale price.

Labour is calling for charities to receive a statutory minimum share from shops selling Christmas cards in their name, after unpublished figures from the Charities Advisory Trust revealed many "royalties" to be shockingly low.

The worst offender in a survey of this year's Christmas cards is a set sold by the chain Books Etc and published by Roger la Borda, from which charities for the homeless

receive 1.8 per cent. That compares to the 20 per cent given by Debenhams to the Cancer Research Campaign for Debenhams' own-brand charity cards, or the 25 per cent of Card Aid, the CAT's own outlet for more than 100 charities.

Charities license their names to publishers for a share in royalties, often determined by the publishers themselves. Nigel Griffiths, Labour's consumer affairs spokesman, said he had been pressing the industry to set higher royalty targets.

"Two per cent is ridiculous. I would like to see 30p in the pound," he said. "The problem is that the lottery has put a lot of pressure on charity funding, so charities are being virtually

blackmailed into letting their names be used for very low returns. If someone offers you £5,000, you might not realise that they're making £100,000."

Publishers say their profit is minimal. But while they make the donations to charity, retailers make handsome, largely undisclosed profits from the cards, as well as receiving the vicarious goodwill of shoppers. As the donation is fixed, the higher the retail price, the lower the percentage the charity receives.

John Proctor, managing director of Scribbler, a retailer whose charity cards, with an average 4 per cent donation, are among the worst in the survey, said he considered them "just another product line" and that

profit margins were irrelevant. Hilary Blume, CAT's director, said chains such as Woolworths and Sainsbury's were "muscling in" on the charity end of the £350m Christmas card market, cutting costs by publishing their own while donating around 10 per cent. "There's an enormous amount of profit there," she said.

Sainsbury's, one of the few stores to comment, refused to say if it made a profit on charity cards, but stressed that it supported charities all year round. In recognition of fears that charities were being exploited, the 1992 Charities Act forced Christmas card publishers to state how much money goes to the given charity. According to the CAT many such statements

are at best opaque and at worst misleading, using terms like "retailer's purchase price".

One batch of royalty cards sold through Books Etc states: "By buying this card you have made a donation of 8 per cent of the wholesale price to Friends of the Earth." The actual percentage of the £3.50 sale price received by the charity is 3.4 per cent, or 12 pence.

Charities themselves are unwilling to bite the hand that feeds. A spokesman for Shelter said the average profit it would accept would be about 10 per cent. "But if, for example, you manage to get a deal with WH Smith for 23 per cent, with their huge distribution that would be quite a good deal."

The card game from the shops compares

Retailer	Charity	Percentage of retail price to charity
THE WORST		
Books Etc	"Homeless Charities"	1.8
Scribbler	Shelter, Crisis	2.0
Neal Street	Care Britain Trading	2.9
Heals	Friends of the Earth	3.0
OH Evans	Greenpeace	5.0
John Lewis	Macmillan Cancer Relief	5.3
Habitat	Save The Children	5.6
Rymans	Oxfam	6.7
Post Office Shops	Save the Children	7.9
Waitrose	WaterAid	8.6
THE BEST		
Card Aid	100+ charities	25.0
Clintons	ICRF	20.2
Debenhams	Cancer Research Campaign	20.0
Paperchase	Honeyput Home	18.2
John Lewis	RNIB	14.2
WH Smith	Guide Dogs for the Blind	13.3
Rymans	Barnardos	12.5
Tesco	Muscular Dystrophy	11.0
Woolworths	RSPCA	10.1
Post Office Shops	Oxfam	10.1

Figures compiled by Charities Advisory Trust

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NATIONAL SAVINGS

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One in five parents now fails

The Conservative educational reforms have tried to raise standards by encouraging schools to compete for pupils and funds. In the schools

Meanwhile, the contradictions in Conservative policy are encouraging the waste of mil-

Department For Education will not usually provide money for

Government and local authorities blame each other. The system risks gridlock."

In Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, parents may express a

Robin Squire, the education minister, accused the Commission of devaluing its research by reaching simplistic conclusions. There was no gridlock, he said.

of their education policy. The report warns of the need for sensible local planning and backs Labour's proposal for regular education plans."

involved. I can find no evidence which leads me to believe that the explosive trace evidence is unsound."

Mr Howard said the Government would consider such an appointment but added that the proposal went beyond the recommendations of the report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice in June.



She certainly has not managed to get them to share the same room. When Madonna gives a press conference today, she will have Sir Andrew at her side. But Sir Tim, who has been invited, will not be present.

Sir Tim failed to attend the American premiere in Los An-



A close associate of Sir Andrew said yesterday: "Of course it's not just an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, but journalists probably write that because Tim never shows up." Sir Andrew's spokesman said: "Andrew is very much looking forward to seeing Tim on

Lloyd Webber is a control freak who is prepared to blow out friendship that Tim Rice thought would last for ever. Rice, I am sure, is resentful. "In a way it is appropriate that Evita should highlight the disillusionment with each other, for it was while working o-

The council yesterday published a beefed-up code of practice, and is planning a series of "audit" visits next year.

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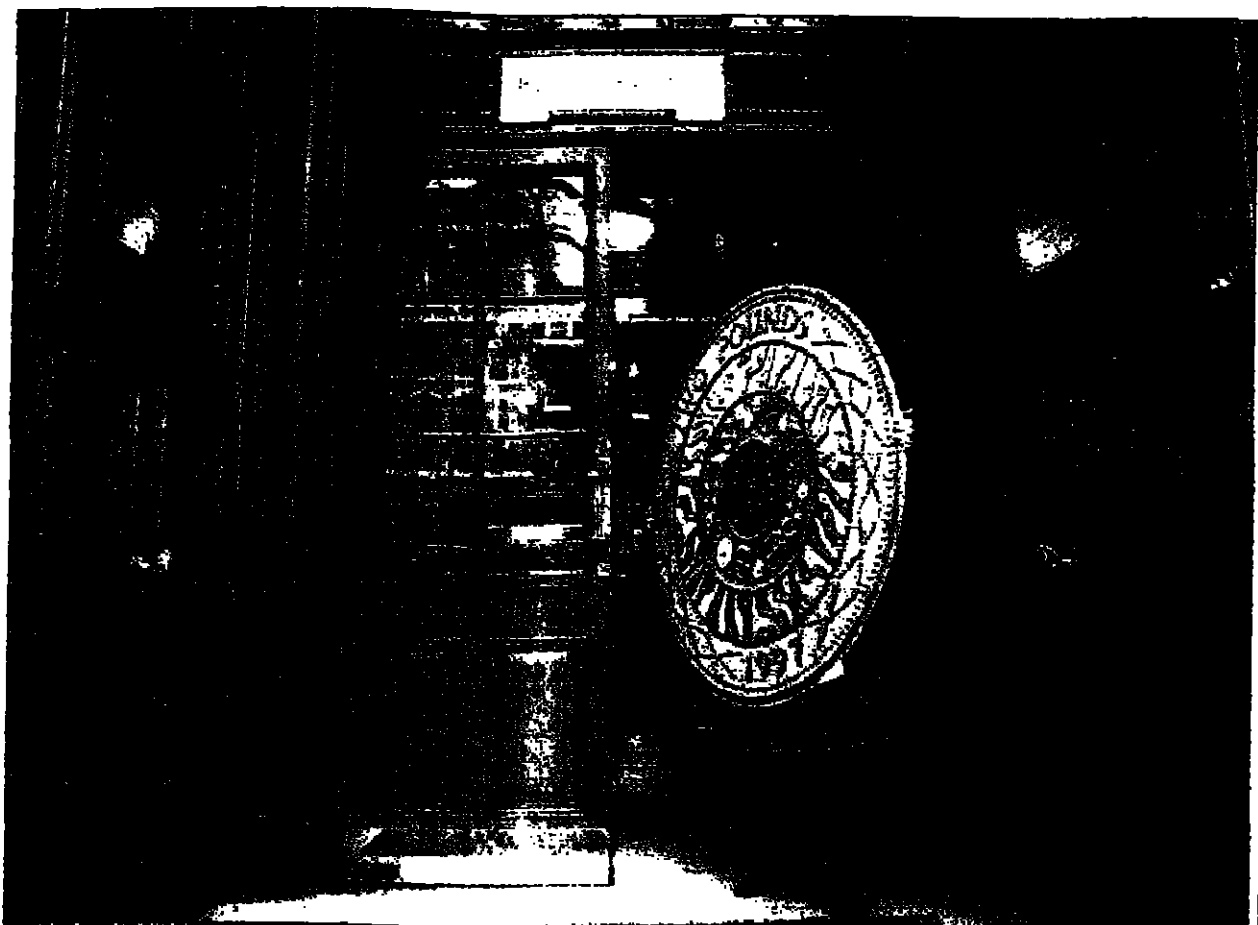


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Loose change: A giant-sized model of the new £2 coin being shown off outside the Treasury yesterday. The new coin - designed by Bruce Rushin, a Norfolk art teacher - goes into circulation next November. Photograph: Andrew Buurman

Hopes raised by hint on easing beef ban

Katherine Butler and Colin Brown

Hopes that the first easing of the worldwide ban on British beef could begin within three to six months were held out yesterday by the Irish agriculture minister Ivan Yates.

He suggested that Northern Ireland could be the first region to enjoy a partial resumption of trade because of its low incidence of BSE and its unique cattle tracing system.

Welcoming the announcement that Britain will after all press ahead with a special slaughter of 100,000 cattle at risk of BSE, Mr Yates, who chaired yesterday's meeting of European farm ministers in Brussels, said it marked the beginning of a new phase, and "a significant step forward".

The bell is still in Britain's court. London must submit a blueprint for meeting EU conditions on herds certified free

of BSE - essentially grass-fed animals - which is the first of the steps for the gradual lifting of the ban set out in the Florence agreement.

The Government will not be ready to proceed until the beginning of February, Mr Hogg told EU colleagues yesterday. Evaluation of this plan will then be conducted by two expert committees before a decisive vote in the EU's standing veterinary committee.

In the Commons, the Prime Minister was forced to withdraw an allegation that Tony Blair, the Labour leader, was "misleading" the Commons in angry clashes over the Government's U-turn on the selective cull.

Mr Blair said BSE - "mad cow disease" - was a "symbol of this government's incompetence". But as John Major hit back, the Speaker, Betty Boothroyd, ordered the Prime Minister to withdraw the allegation that he had misled the

Commons, regarded under Westminster rules as unparliamentary.

Mr Blair's attack touched a raw Tory nerve, by pointing out that in spite of the selective cull, there was still no timetable for the lifting of the ban, which Mr Blair said had been promised by Mr Major after the Florence summit.

The Labour leader told Mr Major: "You said the timetable was in our hands; not in European hands. You said that as a result, at the end of November, the ban would be lifted. It is clear you had no such agreement. The timetable is in the hands of the veterinary committee [of the EU]. You cannot give us a date." Mr Major replied: "You are misleading the House." After the Speaker's intervention, he said it was done innocently but Tory MPs accused Mr Blair of "dissembling".

Although nobody in Brussels yesterday was prepared to offer

any certainty on a timetable given the likely difficulty in tracking high-risk cattle, Mr Hogg's announcement on the cull appears to have given a psychological boost to the negotiations.

Mr Yates said that if the "paperwork" in relation to certified herds can be dealt with in January and early February, then decisions could be expected "mid-year" at the latest. It also appears that while the Government has ostensibly bowed to pressure from Scotland to seek a "UK-wide" lifting of the ban for grass-fed herds, rather than special treatment for Ulster, the criteria will be framed in such a way as to benefit Northern Ireland farmers long before others.

This suggests that the Ulster Unionists, who effectively hold the balance of power in Westminster, have been given assurances from the Government that their farmers will be first to emerge from the embargo.

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PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

SCORING THE EXCHANGES

BLAIR'S ATTACK

THEMES OF THE DAY

GOOD DAY

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

THE QUIP OF THE DAY

THE CREEP OF THE DAY

Heritage chief broke the rules

Christian Wolmar Westminster Correspondent

A former director of English Heritage who resigned after only 14 months breached rules on "the proper conduct of public business", according to an auditor's report covering the events leading to his departure.

Four main actions by Chris Green led to his hurried departure in July, Sir John Bourn, Comptroller and Auditor General, found: the letting of an advertising contract and subsequent cover-up of the circumstances, "inappropriate business expenses" and the purchase, by English Heritage, of office furniture from Mr Green. While these were relatively minor matters and did not amount to fraud, it was clear that Mr Green could not continue in the job after the allegations came to light.

The most serious issue was the fact that in April 1996 he hired an advertising agency to run a short poster campaign on the London Underground at a cost of £161,000 without authorisation from the chairman and then tried to cover up the fact by writing a memorandum several weeks later which was back-dated.

He was involved in a "conflict of interest" over the purchase of furniture for his office from his flat in Edinburgh. Mr Green sold the furniture for use in his English Heritage office. The office services manager, having originally offered £3,762.50 (62.5 per cent of the original

purchase price) increased the offer to £4,431 "having perceived that Mr Green was disappointed with the offer". The transaction was not cleared by the chairman.

The report also found that some overpayments had been made to Mr Green on his expenses, and that he had exceeded guidelines on the prices of meals for business contacts. However, he had paid for some meals out of his own pocket.

While Sir John's report is critical of Mr Green, the matters concerned are relatively trivial and most involve not having properly cleared things with the chairman, Sir Jocelyn Stevens, who sought legal advice as to whether Mr Green was "guilty of gross misconduct". Sources at English Heritage say the real reason for Mr Green's departure was a clash with Sir Jocelyn. "Sir Jocelyn is a very difficult man," one said. "There is a lot more to this report than meets the eye. There was something of a vendetta against Chris."

Another former employee of National Heritage said: "Sir Jocelyn likes to get his own way and Chris did not always agree with him."

Mr Green, 53, had previously had a highly successful 30-year career in the railways. He is now a consultant to Gibb Rail in Reading. He said last night: "I took responsibility for my actions by resigning last summer. I have the highest regard for the work and staff at English Heritage."

Russian fall under

Murders for

Indian cons reel position



Russian nationalists and Chechen extremists fall under suspicion after Red Cross killings

Phil Reeves
Moscow

We will probably never know what was in the warped minds of the individuals who pulled masks over their faces, clipped silencers on their guns and calmly executed six Red Cross workers - five of them women - as they slept in their bedrooms in a rural hospital in the Chechen town of Novye Atagi. But if their plan was to bring more chaos, they may have succeeded. The suspension of many International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operations, the largest in the former war zone, is a heavy blow for Chechnya, which lies in ruins after 21 months of war.

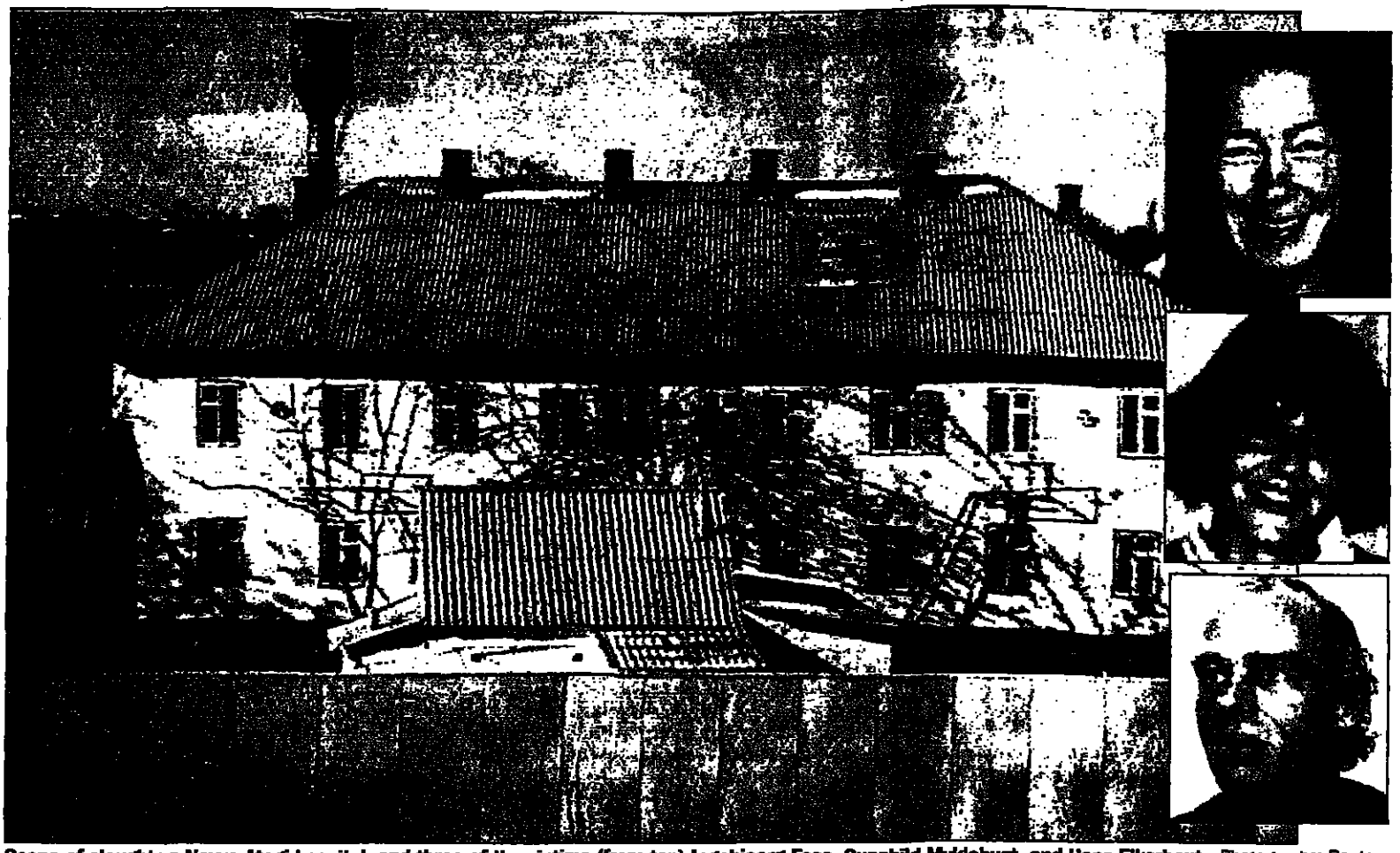


Chechnya's neighbours have also been hit. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has no staff in Chechnya itself, last night said it had halted work in the neighbouring republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and North Ossetia for security reasons. High Commissioner Sadako Ogata expressed deep concern at the lack of security for aid workers at a Geneva meeting with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Nikolai Afanasievsky, a spokeswoman said.

With precious little money coming from Moscow, the ICRC was meeting a desperate need. It was reopening schools, feeding thousands of people, providing medical care to the boards of rural Chechens whose homes and lives were wrecked as the Russian army mounted one attack after another on civilian settlements.

There was a belief yesterday, among the Chechen leadership and among many in Moscow that the murders, which appeared to have been "professionally" carried out, were politically motivated. The presumed aim was to disrupt the elections in Chechnya, scheduled for 27 January which form a key component of the peace deal with Moscow. The Chechen leadership and, at least ostensibly, the Kremlin were keen for the elections to be seen worldwide to be legitimate. International observers were to be invited.

Now foreign participation seems far less certain. So the opponents of the Chechen peace deal may well be able to claim that the results of the elections, which will create a separatist president, are questionable. They may now have to be delayed for this reason.



Scene of slaughter: Novye Atagi hospital, and three of the victims (from top) Ingebjørg Foss, Gunnhild Myklebust, and Hans Elkerbout. Photographs: Reuters

He has reportedly said the war should go on until Chechnya was outright independence. Yesterday Ivan Rybkin, the head of Russia's Security Council who recently replaced the sacked General Alexander

Lebed, arrived in Grozny, where he condemned the killings (as did Russia's Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin) and told reporters Raduyev's hostage-taking was a "pitiful failure".

As it dispatched aid workers to safety in the nearby Russian ethnic republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, the Red Cross made clear it was unwilling to resume full operations without a guarantee that its foreign workers

would be safe. The murders, said a spokesman in Moscow, were "an assassination". Such guarantees will be hard for the separatists who now run Chechnya to give, unless the killers are caught. Yet without

Red Cross help, Chechens will have to struggle on, living in the wreckage of a war without adequate health care, water, or housing. The sorry history of a long-suffering people will only grow grimmer.

Murders force aid agencies to quit anarchy of Grozny

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent
Phil Reeves
Moscow

Aid agencies working in Chechnya and neighbouring Russian republics yesterday reacted with shock and disbelief at the attack which killed six Red Cross personnel - five of them women nurses - and wounded one. All the international aid agencies had last night pulled their staff out of the immediate vicinity of Grozny, which was deemed too anarchic for them to operate in effectively, or were prepared to do so if the situation deteriorates.

"This is an attack directed at far more than six aid workers from the International Committee of the Red Cross", said Kim Gordon-Bates, a spokesman for the Geneva-based organisation, which operates in war zones to protect victims of war, whether prisoners, wounded or victims of associated diseases such as TB and polio.

The Red Cross had 20 workers in Chechnya. Last night the 13 who had survived and not been wounded had been withdrawn to Nalchik, the main airfield for Grozny, used by the Russian forces in the disastrous military campaign terminated recently.

The Red Cross said the move was temporary and that the organisation remained independent of other international agencies. "We've frozen operations for now," Mr Gordon-Bates said. "A certain number of answers have to be given: the whos, the whys. The people who did this knew what they were doing. They knew damn well it was a hospital. It was extremely well-marked."

The Red Cross make a point of being well-known in the areas where it is operating as this is the best form of security. The ICRC has a "Dissemination Department" whose job is to ensure every official and soldier on every checkpoint is told what the Red Cross does and why, and why the Red Cross should be allowed to do it. Only when full "political preparation" is complete does it set up a permanent base, such as the hospital where the staff attacked early yesterday morning were working.

The international aid agencies or non-governmental organisations recruit people, mainly in their thirties, with a wide range of relevant skills for relief and development work. Medical staff - doctors, nurses and medical technicians - are particularly valued. Service abroad with an international agency, gaining experience of primary health care and certain diseases rare in the West, is a step on the promotion ladder for many medical personnel, while others find work as a GP or junior hospital doctor in Western country dull or frustrating. Former armed services personnel, officers and senior NCOs, are also attracted to the work.

Like everyone who works in the aid business in Chechnya, the Red Cross workers were willing to do their job amid considerable danger. Since the war began, in December 1994, two foreign aid workers - an American and a Finn - have been killed. Others have been subject to threats, intimidation, and kidnappings. This year nine people from the ICRC, have been kidnapped, for brief periods, in a rash of abductions from almost every aid agency.

One of these occurred at the Novye Atagi hospital this autumn, although it was quickly resolved by the agency, using its Chechen contacts. According to the Red Cross, security had since been tightened up, but the building was not heavily guarded. Clearly, the murders - a low point, even by the dismal standards of blood-soaked Chechnya - were beyond anyone's worst expectations.

Indian censors lay down the reel position on Kama Sutra

Indian censors are taking a variety of positions on the Kama Sutra. The film-maker Mira Nair, whose latest feature is inspired by the world's most venerable sex-book, says most of these would prove impossible for her. A special tribunal in Bombay will rule this week on Ms Nair's appeal against a ban on the uncensored version of her film.



The film-maker Mira Nair (left) is rocking society with a production of the most famous sex-book that 'empowers women', writes Jan McGirk in New Delhi

flesh. Sex that is repressed becomes taboo, pernicious, and twisted... These women [in the film] empower themselves. It is a narrative tale of sexual politics, back before the Mughals came. I try to marry Eros with the divine."

Kama Sutra - a Tale of Love stars Rekha, a fortyish star who crossed over from the potboilers pumped out by India's "Bollywood", and casts her as a sexual maestro with provocative apprentices. It also introduces the beautiful Indira Verma as the plotting servant. After getting kudos in San Sebastian and Toronto, Ms Nair feared over-exposure and withdrew the movie from the London film festival. It is due to premiere on Valentine's Day in the United States and should be in London cinemas by early spring.



Gripping stuff: The actress Rekha (right), playing the character Rasa Devi, teaching her students the 'throbbing kiss', one of the Kama Sutra positions. Photograph: Reuters

PDS 'pact' spurs defections

Imre Karacs
Bonn

Seven prominent east German politicians announced yesterday that they were defecting to Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats because they suspected their own left-wing parties of trying to forge an alliance with the heirs of the Communist regime.

Their decision put the Social Democrats and the Greens on the defensive, forcing them to deny any plans to strike an electoral pact with the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the third biggest in the east.

"I have said it many times, and I shall say it again: there can be no co-operation or coalition with a post-Stalinist party," declared Joschka Fischer, the leader of the Greens. Mr Fischer was reacting to news that one of his MPs, Vera Lengsfeld, had crossed over to the government benches because she felt the Greens were "prepared to help the PDS back to power in order to get into power itself".

Ms Lengsfeld, a civil rights activist arrested in the 1980s by the Honecker regime, has strong personal reasons for opposing a party which has so far refused to repudiate its past. In 1992 she divorced her husband after discovering that he had spied on her for the Stasi. The six other new Christian Democrats, not in parliament, were also known opponents of the Communist regime.

Until recently, the Greens and the Social Democrats have maintained a common front with the right against the PDS, convinced that the ex-Communists would eventually fade away. Their calculations have turned out to be wrong, and party strategists now expect the outcome of the next general election to hinge on votes in the east, and the mandates the PDS might be able to contribute to a putative "Red-Green" coalition.

The polls show that if elections were held today, the three parties together would in theory be able to dislodge Mr Kohl. But in practice, as the events of yesterday illustrated, even a hint of a deal with the PDS would exact retribution. Politics in the east continues to have a dynamism of its own, far removed from the fault lines which divide the rest of the country.

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Memory of 1974 keeps Cypriot peace deal grounded

Tony Barber
Nicosia

The gutted shell of a Cyprus Airways passenger plane lies on the tarmac of Nicosia airport, silent and sinister testimony to the failure of 22 years of international efforts to solve the island's problems. The plane, a Trident Jet, bears the scars of gunfire from Turkish forces who foiled the pilot's attempt to take off with his passengers and

crew and escape Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in July 1974.

Twenty-two years later, not only is the plane still there, but the airport itself looks as if it has been trapped in time. Wall posters in the departure hall display advertisements for the kind of watches, cigarettes and beach holidays that people bought in 1974.

The perfectly preserved skeleton of a bird lies on the floor. Bullet-shattered windows



Delayed departure: The Cyprus Airways jet which has remained stuck on the tarmac of Nicosia airport since war broke out in July 1974

Photograph: Adrian Brooks/Rea

remind visitors of the fighting that erupted in and around Nicosia all those summers ago. Such scenes speak of the mountainous task facing Britain, its European Union partners and the United States

as they try to launch the most serious effort at breaking the Cyprus deadlock since 1974. All declare that the *status quo* on Cyprus is unacceptable, yet the *status quo* at Nicosia airport has taken on the air of eternity.

It is the bleakest, emptiest airport in Europe, perhaps the world. All the clocks, information boards, luggage conveyor belts and signs at check-in desks and passport control were taken down long ago.

There are no people and no vehicles outside, except an occasional United Nations soldier driving a van. When no one is visiting, a UN officer locks the terminal building with a padlock labelled "Airport Keys".

The airport lies within a UN-protected area dividing the Turkish-held north from the Greek Cypriot, government-held south of Cyprus. No commercial plane has been allowed to fly into or out of Nicosia since 1974, an inconvenience which obliges most people heading for the capital's Greek sector to fly into Larnaca, 30 miles away on the south coast.

There was once a plan to re-open the airport for civilians, part of a set of UN "confidence-building measures" to promote an overall settlement. Even under these proposals, Greek and Turkish Cypriots would have used different entrances and exits to the airport.

If the airport is stuck in time, so are the attitudes of many on both sides of the island. Crossing from the government-controlled sector of Nicosia to the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", one sees a poster proclaiming: "Turkish murderers out of Cyprus" and then, on the Turkish side, a poster proclaiming: "The clock cannot be put back to the 1963-74 period".

This harks back to the slaughter of Turkish Cypriots in 1963, three years after independence from Britain. It is an episode etched as searingly in their memory as is Turkey's 1974 invasion and occupation of the north for Greek Cypriots.

Now the outside world is urging both sides to shed prejudices inherited from 1963 and 1974. The aim is to open direct talks next spring between the two communities' leaders, President Glafcos Clerides and Rauf Denktaş.

However, the world is making its long-awaited "big push on Cyprus" at a time when tensions on the island, and between Greece and Turkey, are higher than for many years. Five people have been killed in ethnic violence this year, and an arms race is gathering speed.

The difficulties were highlighted in a visit paid this week by Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary. After issuing a 10-point proposal for ending the stalemate, he was criticised by



Denktaş: Fears EU will quash separatist hopes

Greek Cypriots for talking about one "international personality" for Cyprus rather than a single undivided sovereignty.

At the same time, Mr Denktaş stonewalled him by rejecting any linkage between a settlement of the Cyprus dispute and the island's application to join the EU.

The Greek Cypriot-led government favours EU entry, but Mr Denktaş fears that EU membership would spell the death of his separatist republic.

Hong Kong's leader-to-be shows spirit

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

Tung Chee-nga, who will lead Hong Kong's first post-colonial government, has delivered an unexpectedly strong message about China's interference in the territory's economy on the eve of his departure to Peking, where he will be formally appointed Chief Executive of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong.

Speaking yesterday at a businessmen's lunch, Mr Tung said: "We must deal resolutely with any organisation at provincial and city level from mainland China who will be seeking special favours in establishing themselves in Hong Kong. They are welcome to participate in Hong Kong's economic activities but they must abide by the same rules as everyone else."

He also delivered a stern warning about preventing corruption from creeping "into our dedicated and efficient civil service" and said he would ensure that "money and politics do not mix".

In making these remarks Mr Tung appears to have taken on board some of the most frequently expressed public fears about Hong Kong being engulfed in a sea of corruption from China after it resumes sovereignty in July.

Nevertheless, he made it equally clear that he was not in favour of any action which could be seen as confronting the new sovereign power.

He conceded that there was scope for Hong Kong and China to have different views about "what needs to be done" but stressed that "quiet negotiation does not mean weakness. Achieving your aim needs not to be done through open confrontation and street demonstrations".

Asked who would be his boss, Mr Tung at first jokingly shrugged off the question by suggesting it would be his wife, Betty, but then conceded that part of the purpose of his visit



Tung: must ensure 'money and politics do not mix'

to Peking was to gain an answer to this question. It is likely he will be received by both President Jiang Zemin and the Prime Minister, Li Peng, who should be in a position to give a definitive reply.

In Peking, the foreign-ministry spokesman told Hong Kong journalists that the stability of the civil service was essential for a smooth transition of power. This remark was taken as meaning that the leaders of the civil service would retain their jobs. Fears have been expressed that China would exclude civil servants regarded as too close to the current British administration.

The spokesman also made it clear that although Mr Tung would nominate the policy-level civil servants, they would have to be approved in Peking.

Mr Tung will also discuss with Chinese leaders the operation of a provincial legislature to be formed next month and run in parallel with the existing Legislative Council, which China will abolish.

He has acknowledged that the existence of two parallel law-making bodies is problematic but insisted yesterday that Britain was ignoring reality by refusing to acknowledge the provisional body.

He said that doubts about its legality could be resolved by a simple act from the National People's Congress, China's rubber-stamp parliament.

EU block citizens' right to claim asylum

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Zaireans dance for joy as Mobutu returns

William Wallis
Reuters

Kinshasa - Zaire's President, Mobutu Sese Seko, returned home yesterday to a rapturous welcome after four months in Europe where he had surgery for prostate cancer.

Up to 20,000 people packed the airport outside the capital Kinshasa to welcome home the man whose supporters describe him as the symbol of unity in the anarchic Central African nation.

A rebel coalition has overwhelmed Zaire's ragged army in the east in the last two months, taking the key towns of Goma, Bukavu and Uvira.

Many thousands more lined the 10 miles from the capital to the airport. Tight security surrounded the homecoming with army sharpshooters on rooftops at the airport and civil guard troops in trucks along the road from the capital.

The crowds, some wearing imitation leopard-skin hats, surged forward as the plane taxied to a halt.

President Mobutu smiled as he walked down the steps from the aircraft with his wife, Bobi LaSowa, as cheering, drumming, music and chanting surrounded the airport.



Desperately missed: President gets a rousing welcome at Kinshasa airport following his four-month absence in Europe

Photograph: AP

Wearing his trade-mark leopard-skin hat, he walked unaided and easily, carrying, as always, a carved walking stick. Prime Minister Kengo wa Dondo waited at the aircraft

steps. A small girl handed the President a huge bouquet of flowers. He shook hands all round and joined in singing the national anthem. The crowd erupted into cheering as he

raised his arms in acknowledgement. Mr Mobutu and his wife later left the airport by car with the fiercely loyal presidential guard protecting their convoy.

The Zairean rebels remained defiant in spite of the return of President Mobutu to Kinshasa, and said they were ready for any counter-attack on eastern Zaire.

One Zairean newspaper said Mr Mobutu plans to stay in Zaire for only two or three weeks, before completing his convalescence in his villa overlooking the Mediterranean.

significant shorts

Milosevic meets poll protesters

President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia met students who presented demands for democracy, one of whom said he promised to investigate election-fraud charges. It was the first time Mr Milosevic met protesters who have held four weeks of demonstrations since opposition victories in local elections were overturned. AP - Belgrade

Belgian police smash Nigerian sex-slave ring

Belgian police smashed a ring involving 300 Nigerian girls brought in on forged papers and sold into sex slavery. They arrested 12 people; the ring also involved Italy, the Netherlands and Germany, although the girls mostly ended up as prostitutes in Antwerp and Brussels. Reuter - Brussels

Clinton lawsuit cash 'tainted'

The fund set up to pay the First Family's legal expenses estimated \$640,000 (\$425,000), saying it may be from improper sources, as controversy continues over \$2m of dubious Democrat funds for the 1996 election. The Clintons' legal bills, arising from Whitewater and the Paula Jones affair, are estimated at \$2.2m. Rupert Cornwell - Washington

Killer wins a reprieve

The US Supreme Court stayed the execution of Joseph Roger O'Dell, whose appeal drew the support of the Pope, pending a review of his formal appeal. He was convicted of murdering a woman outside a nightclub. AP - Richmond

Case sheathed in mystery

Israeli police discovered why burgled homes near Tel Aviv all had greasy doorhandles. Thieves caught in a stake-out told investigators they had used lubricated condoms instead of gloves in the burglaries because they were easier to put on than gloves and were fingerprint-safe. Reuter - Jerusalem

Saddam's shot son reappears

President Saddam Hussein of Iraq's son Uday, shot and wounded last week, appeared on television chatting with a Qatari envoy and a reporter. Reuter - Baghdad

EU blocks citizens' right to claim asylum

Sarah Helm
Brussels

European leaders have quietly agreed to write off 40 years of human rights laws by proposing that European citizens should no longer have the right to claim asylum in another European Union member state.

A paragraph drafted at the weekend Dublin summit suggests that EU governments now believe that no EU citizen will ever again be in need of asylum. The proposal was first made by Spain, which is angry that Belgium has offered refuge to alleged supporters of the Basque separatist movement, ETA. However, other governments appear to have adopted the plan with alacrity and intend to insert it into proposals for creating an "area of freedom justice and security" for European citizens.

Without any public consultation, the heads of government have instructed their officials working on the EU draft treaty to "establish it as a clear principle that no member state of the Union may apply for asylum in another member state, tak-

ing into account international treaties".

gum, are the most recent examples of asylum-seeking between EU states. In one case a couple fled Spain after they were accused of giving shelter to Basque extremists - an accusation they denied. As recently as 1978 Britain was found guilty by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg of inflicting "inhuman and degrading treatment" on prisoners held in Northern Ireland.

Amnesty International has recently produced highly critical reports on ill-treatment of individuals by security forces in Germany, France and Italy. Concern about the EU plan has been heightened by parallel efforts in the United Nations to restrict the definition of refugees to exclude people deemed by a particular state to be "planning, inciting or funding terrorism".

The EU proposal is also viewed by groups monitoring European justice proposals as a further indication of the union's increasingly restrictive attitude towards asylum and immigration in general. For more than five years member states have been attempting to co-ordinate policy on asylum and immigration by establishing an ever tighter "ring fence" around the EU's external borders to prevent would-be refugees entering.

A series of measures have been agreed in outline, including a common visa list, and procedures for accepting refugees. The UNHCR and other groups have regularly complained that many of these measures have reduced the ability of asylum seekers to have their cases heard. For example the EU has developed the idea of a "safe third country", which means asylum seekers from countries deemed by the EU to be "safe" cannot make a claim.

Earlier this year the EU adopted a new restrictive definition of "refugee", to establish the principle that only individuals fleeing persecution from governments or state institutions could have a right to asylum in the EU. Amnesty believes the proposal is part of an EU drive to tighten barriers against all asylum seekers. "I am sure there is a policy to limit the possibility for people to seek asylum," said Brigitte Ernst of Amnesty.

The UNHCR believes that countries who have signed the Geneva Conventions, as all EU member have, cannot cordon off one set of countries saying the human rights provisions cannot apply there.

Leading article, page 11

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EU asylum should not just be discarded

No citizen of any country in the European Union should ever need to seek asylum in another EU state, so which liberal pro-European could disagree that the time has come to abolish the right to do so? Well, we may be liberal and pro-European, but in our view this proposal is premature and potentially dangerous.

The abolition of asylum claims within the EU is, as we report today, one of the hitherto-unnoticed suggestions in the draft treaty tabled at last weekend's Dublin summit. The document proposes that "no citizen of a member state of the Union may apply for asylum in another member state." As no one can remember the last time any EU national was granted asylum in another EU country, this may seem like a bit of harmless tidying-up, of limited interest in the day-to-day. Nowhere in the EU as presently constituted is there any country where violence for political ends can be justified, and so it follows that there cannot be any "freedom fighters" seeking sanctuary. Nor can anyone in the EU suffer from, in the words of the 1951 Geneva Convention, "a well-founded fear of persecution" by their government on grounds of race, religion or nationality. So the argument goes.

And, as the EU is already an area in which there is free movement of

people, made up of established democratic states which respect human rights, the Irish draft treaty argues that this would be a simplification to help create an "area of freedom, security and justice".

Well, hold on a minute. We should be treating the negotiations about Europe's future with the same level of seriousness and ambition as the drafters of the American Constitution. That is not our view: it is the view declared by John Bruton, the Irish Prime Minister, at the end of the summit last weekend. Let us put aside the unworthy thought that Mr Bruton, John Major and Helmut Kohl do not stand comparison with James Madison, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. Let us instead welcome the idea of a European Constitution and look at what it means to be serious and ambitious about drafting it.

It is no good foisting a draft treaty entitled "Adapting the EU for the Benefit of its Peoples" on the peoples of Europe without a real attempt to consult and inform those same peoples. Specifically, the right to "internal asylum" may be largely theoretical, but it raises hugely significant issues, and it has not been debated in any meaningful way. There are further grounds for scepticism, in that far from being part of a disinterested attempt to simplify the laws of the EU "for the

benefit of its peoples", this proposal seems to arise from a desire to appease the Spanish government. The Spaniards were outraged at the start of this year when the Belgian government refused to extradite two Basque separatists on terrorism charges. The Belgian authorities may have been swayed by reports of the appalling state of some Spanish jails, which could conceivably amount to "inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" — a phrase from the European Convention on Human Rights which is often used as a definition of "persecution".

Now, all EU member states are signatories to the European Convention and so there should be no question of human rights abuse within the frontiers of the Union. But there is. The United Kingdom has in the past been found guilty of subjecting suspected terrorists in Northern Ireland to degrading treatment. And the procedures for enforcing rights under the Convention are cumbersome. More fundamentally, those rights are not part of EU law. They have been incorporated into the laws of some member states, but not others (such as Britain's).

It would be wrong in principle, therefore, for the EU to legislate to remove the right to internal asylum until it has also legislated to protect the human rights of its citizens. But this does indeed take us into the territory of a Constitution for Europe — which would be a good thing, but into which we should not stray by accident or stealth. The abolition of asylum within the EU would also be more credible if all EU countries had evidently fair procedures, and if the trend in our attitudes to refugees from elsewhere in the world were towards strengthening rather than weakening protection for the persecuted. Sadly, the trend is in the opposite direction. Michael Howard's posturing at the United Nations this week, to refuse asylum to those suspected of the "planning, incitement or funding of terrorism", cannot override the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects people from inhuman or degrading treatment "irrespective of the person in question". But it casts a dark shadow over the Home Secretary's intentions.

Until we have a European Constitution, it is risky to argue that the Union is fast becoming such a perfect group of countries that the citizens of one would never need protection in another. The history of our Continent this century is not reassuring: we have seen paroxysms of violence and per-

secution in unlikely places. Politics can change, and there are still large fascist parties across Europe.

It might be argued that, because there are no applications for asylum within the EU (apart, apparently, from Jehovah's Witnesses who occasionally claim unsuccessfully that they are persecuted), there is no need for a right to asylum. A better argument would be that no protection should be removed until it can be shown that it will never be needed.

A time to give... 2p in the £1

It is the season to be scamming. Only 2p in every pound that customers spend on Books Etc's "homeless charities" cards actually goes to a good cause — in contrast to the 20p that Debenhams passes on. But there's no point in getting too indignant; these companies are cashing in on our laziness, not our festive generosity. If we really cared about donating to charity, we could check the small print on the side of the cards and avoid those which try to conceal how much cash they are really passing on. The solution is simple. Don't get mad complaining about exploitative retailers and publishers; get even, and wield a little consumer power.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A millennium park for the stifled south

Sir: A major new National Park in the pastoral south-eastern corner of the country would be a wonderful millennium project (leading article, 13 December).

This could buy up set-aside farming land (ideally in hill and remote countryside) and landscape it, removing modern field patterns, fences and walls to create a large area of old-style heathland or deer forest in which walkers and horse-riders could roam free. As a climber I would like to see such a national park contain artificial cliffs, boulders and edges (carefully designed to blend into the environment), and water sports could also be catered for with large lakes drained at times of spate by wild water rivers for rafting and canoeing.

The "Capability" Browns of the 21st century could make their reputations by providing pleasing environments, not for a privileged aristocracy but for mass popular use. The car could be restricted to the periphery and the odd through route. Adjacent railway stops could allow easy access from the cities.

I recall with despair the very inadequate walking and outdoor recreational possibilities within striking distance of north London when I lived there in the Seventies. Public footpaths were jealously hemmed in with barbed wire fences and areas of open hills, fields or heathland were in short supply. Contrasting this with the magnificent moors, forests, rivers, crags and lakes that I can now enjoy in close proximity to my home near Macclesfield, I am amazed that people in the south have put up with outdoor recreational poverty for so long.

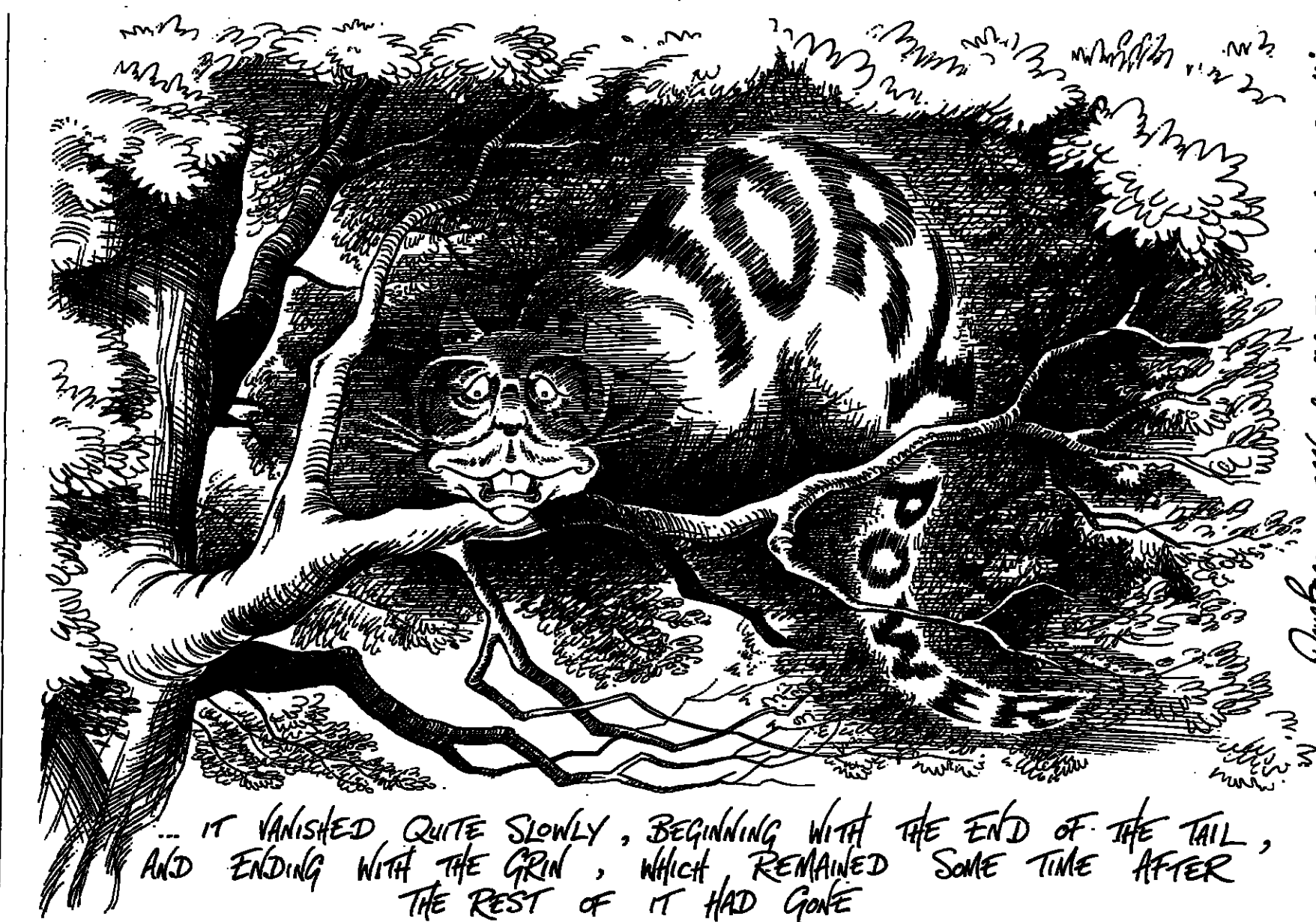
Every weekend, thousands of them pack the motorways on the long trek north or west to the distant national parks.

A large area (or areas) of public recreation space linking up the fields, hills, copses and rivers in some of the remoter areas of, say, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire would be a priceless national asset for the future and would also create jobs and boost tourist-related activities in an area now given up mainly to monotonous modern agriculture. KEN WILSON
Langley, Cheshire

Sir: Your leading article castigating the plans for monumental celebration of the millennium is apt and timely. The ideal project would be one whose value would grow with the years, not decay once the party's over.

Why not a set of projects which move us forward environmentally? In addition to your excellent deciduous forests, what about millennial allotments, millennial cycle paths (but to meet real everyday transport needs, not weekend leisure), even millennial house insulation?

What about technology? A hundred and fifty years ago, Victorian society created the great museums and institutions of learning to ensure that the country would benefit from advances in knowledge and creativity. In recent years, many advancing nations have kick-started this process by creating national centres; the excellent Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bangalore is one of many. A few years ago, the UK toyed with the idea of "Paradise Centres"; the



... IT VANISHED QUITE SLOWLY, BEGINNING WITH THE END OF THE TAIL, AND ENDING WITH THE GRIN, WHICH REMAINED SOME TIME AFTER THE REST OF IT HAD GONE

millennium is the time for it to be dusted off.

Lastly, the future of the UK depends on our children and their children. One simple idea would be a national programme to teach parenting skills, both in school and in the community. Professor CHRIS ADAMS
Birkenhead, Merseyside

Sir: I too am attracted by the idea of a Millennium Forest. But before we plant it, would it be a good idea to demolish another forest: the pylons that disfigure so much of our countryside? Spending £700m on burying power cables would provide more people with a significant and enduring monument than any current plans for domes and wheels. MORNAY DAVISON
Templecombe, Somerset

Sir: Quite right. Dump the empty Greenwich "celebration". My recipe for success? First, sack the Millennium Commission and let no one over 30 (apart from myself, at 49) near any future plans. Second, make the Glastonbury Festival in the year 2000 the centrepiece of a nationwide celebration of music of all kinds in all places. Third, hire a creative madman (Jean-Paul Gaultier comes to mind) to produce an extravagant parade through the streets of London as a focus for a street party. BRIAN G MITCHELL
Cambridge

Sir: You are right to attack the tawdry proposals for a millennium exhibition at Greenwich. An alternative would be to create an open space around St Paul's Cathedral and down to the Thames by clearing away the relatively

undistinguished buildings which currently hem in Wren's masterpiece. JOHN HUTCHINSON
London SW20

Sir: Your leading article highlights the empty symbolism of the proposed millennium projects. Something more worthy of a civilised country would be for all millennium funds to be put towards eliminating homelessness and ensuring that every family and individual had a decent home to live in. (Sister) JOAN FABER RSCJ
London E7

Sir: Why do we have to celebrate the year 2000 by building something? Why can't we celebrate by getting rid of an eyesore, eg Slough? R P HEINEMANN
Caversham, Berkshire

German dollar

Sir: The most appealing explanation I have heard for the origin of the dollar sign, \$ (letter, 17 December), is that it is a rare example of a pictogram in English. Originally it was written ISI, to depict a river running between its banks, ie a valley or, in German, Tal. The currency thus denoted was the "Taler". We can still hear the sound "Taler" in the American pronunciation of "dollar". The written pictogram has been squashed into one character space as \$. SARA CLARKE
Hayfield, Derbyshire

Green machines make sense

Sir: So we "say one thing and do another" when choosing green washing machines, televisions and cars (leading article, 11 December). This is hardly surprising, for usually there is little alternative.

Nobody wants to buy a product that breaks down quickly, and then needs to be thrown out because replacement parts aren't available. Yet how often do we have the option of choosing a product that is built to last, and designed to be repaired, reused and recycled? We need to make dramatic cuts in our use of raw materials. By making things last twice as long, we would be using half as much — that would be a start.

To do this, we need legislative changes to ensure that products are designed to make sense for the environment and sense for consumers. Dr ANNA THOMAS
Waste Campaigner
Friends of the Earth
London N1

Credibility gulf

Sir: At a time when the armed forces are having an increasingly difficult time with recruitment, and needing to rely more and more heavily on the Territorial Army, the Ministry of Defence's management of "Gulf war syndrome" is difficult to reconcile. Mr Soames's statement in the Commons (report, 11 December) was welcome for its honesty.

However, the whole affair is in stark contrast with the American approach to the treatment of their veterans who developed problems as a result of service in the Gulf.

Not only did they immediately undertake to fund research into the disorders, but they have offered no-fault compensation for those affected. In comparison, the onus has been on our veterans to prove their illnesses are genuine. For five years they have needed to fight a war of attrition to force the MoD into accepting the reality of their plight.

How are we to persuade other brave men and women to risk their lives in the fight for Queen and country when those disabled by active service are seen having to battle for the right to compensation when they return home?

G S ARUL FRCS
Captain RAMC (V)
Bristol

Violent reactions

Sir: Dr Peter Davies (letter, 14 December) reports on work which suggests that randomly selected adults are not influenced by fictional violence in the same way as when they view film of real violence. Unfortunately, his own formulation reveals the limits of its usefulness: "Normal adults can differentiate between fantasy and reality." Perhaps he would consider arranging a study to determine the effect of fictional violence on adults who are not normal. Dr CONNOR FERRIS
Exeter

When chickens lived on the roof

Sir: The house with grass on the roof that Peter Cumming plans will not be the first in Kentish Town ("Rabbits on the roof in Britain's greenest house", 14 December).

Nearly 30 years ago the late architect Philip Pank built such a house for his family at Torriano Cottages, where they still live. Chickens occupied a corner of the roof garden at one time, delighting some neighbours, though not all, with their dawn cries.

As to rabbits, we had two for years, much loved by dinner guests for their tameness in spite of their tendency to snatch bread. They also appreciated cigarette ends, dregs of sherry, sugar and, unfortunately, cut flowers.

I would not, however, recommend Peter Cumming to get two males, even limp-pawed ones, as it is the males who tend to dig the largest holes in the lawn. What about two comfortable spinsters in fluffy coats? GILLIAN TINDALL
London NW5

Barbie effect

Sir: It must be Christmas because Suzanne Moore is writing the annual article about Barbie dolls (13 December). For several years my daughter enacted gender roles with Barbie and Ken. Now aged 18, my daughter is reading women's studies at Lancaster and her preferred role model is Jo Brand. ROSE MEADE
Ashford, Kent

Pain is the clue to animal rights

Sir: Janet George (letter, 16 December) describes animal rights as a "spurious" philosophy. I beg to differ. We may believe that the quality of the average adult human life is such that it is more important than the life of a non-human animal. It is less self-evident that a new-born infant or even an adult with a profound mental disability has a higher quality of life than many animals.

However we would still, quite rightly, be horrified if someone suggested that we should deliberately inflict pain on these people for medical research or rear them in cramped cages and then use them as food. The reason why this would be unethical cannot simply be that they are a member of our own species. That would be arbitrary and no more logical than a racist or sexist would be in giving special treatment to their own race or gender.

The real reason that we cannot justify treating people in this way is because they would suffer pain and deprivation, through no fault of their own, and not for their own benefit. These arguments apply equally to the animals that we use for vivisection and factory farming. These practices are therefore immoral for the same reasons as if they were done to people. They should be stopped immediately. RICHARD MOUNTFORD
Birmingham

Keep Spice Girls away from Dad

Sir: What do *The Independent* and our father have in common? The Spice Girls! ("Spice Girls vote Thatcher the new leader of their band", 13 December; letter, 14 December) What is happening to what has always been regarded in our family as a serious paper? Now, every morning, our father, who is a source of embarrassment at the best of times, quotes long, mostly boring facts about the Spice Girls, and how it must be right because it is in *The Independent*.

As three teenagers who are not in the slightest bit interested in this group, can we ask that you please stop putting their photo on the front cover and providing our father with more irrelevant facts. Let's have some real news. Come back to earth, *Independent* — there are better ways to attract young readers! CLAIRE (17), HELEN (15) and ADRIAN (12) LANSDOWN
Oudby, Leicestershire

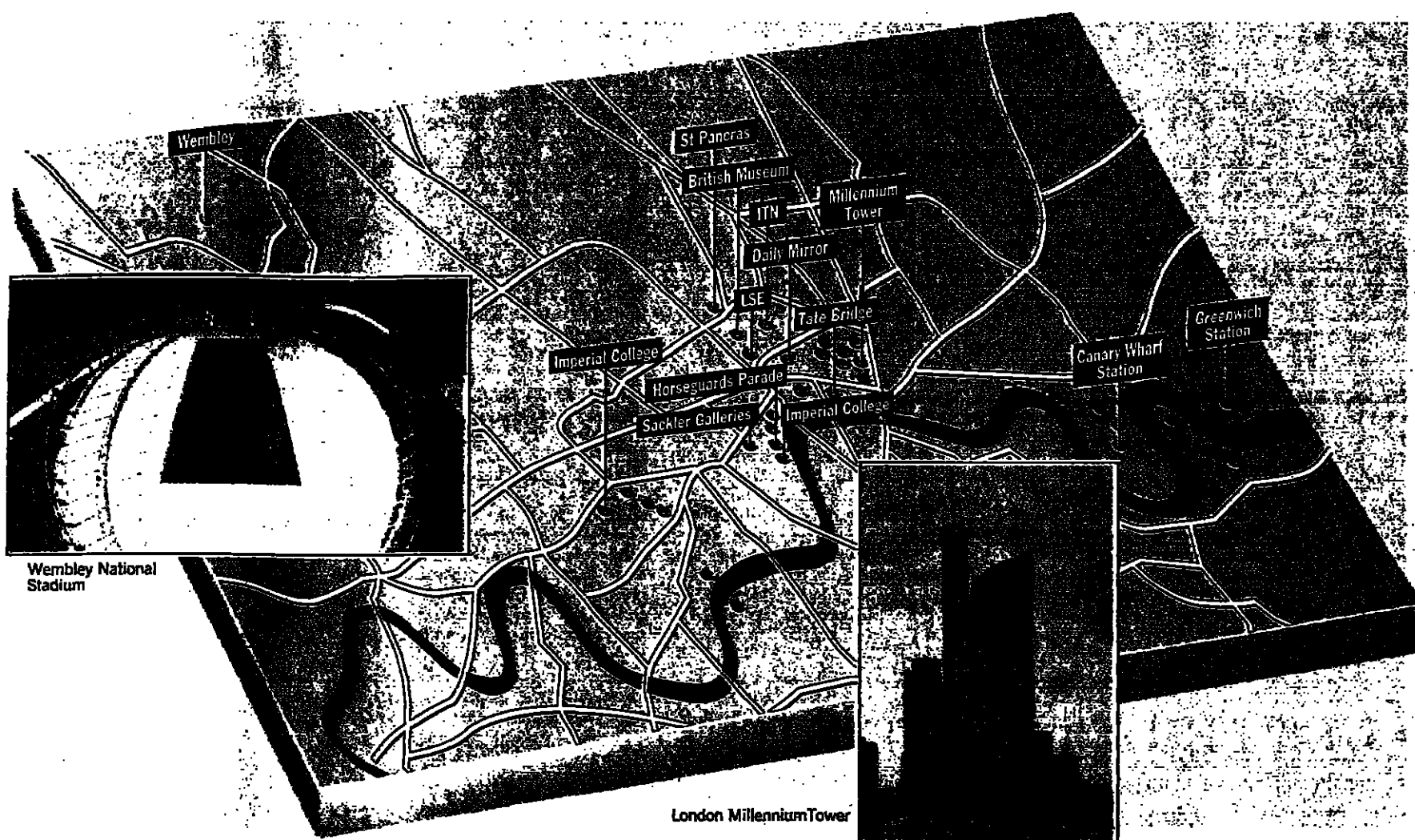
Orwellian vision

Sir: With reference to the article on pigs acting as donors for transplant surgery (report, 17 December), I refer you to the end of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again, but already it was impossible to say which was which." ALAN RAYNER
Dorchester, Dorset

Guinness for gays

Sir: Dr Alan Bullion asks why gay bars don't sell good beer (letter, 16 December). Should he ever come north, I would recommend Squires, in Glasgow: the Guinness is the best in the West of Scotland. DESMOND COUGHLAN
Cumbernauld, Strathclyde

essay



Capital design: Sir Norman Foster (right) is imposing his instantly recognisable style on the architecture of London

Photograph: Nicholas Turpin

Sir Norman Foster's buildings already dominate the skyline of London, as Sir Christopher Wren's did 300 years ago. And like it or not, says Jonathan Glancey, there are more to come

Three hundred years ago, Sir Christopher Wren signed his name in domes and towers across the skyline of London. From Chelsea to Greenwich via the City of London, Britain's most famous architect punctuated the capital with what were and remain some of Europe's finest buildings: the Royal Hospital, Chelsea; St Paul's Cathedral; the rebuilt City churches and the Royal Hospital (later the Royal Naval College), Greenwich.

Three hundred years later, Sir Norman Foster, Britain's best known and most celebrated contemporary architect, is doing much the same. Foster's canvas is even larger than Wren's, reflecting the scale of a city that has expanded to become, and remains, one of the largest, wealthiest and most creative in the world.

Yesterday Foster was given the go-ahead to transform

Wembley Stadium into the world-class sports and entertainment centre it deserves to be. Meanwhile Foster and his team - Britain's biggest architectural practice - have been working on a scheme to remodel the route through Trafalgar Square, Horseguards Parade and Parliament Square. They are also revamping the British Museum, and have won a competition for a pedestrian bridge across the Thames, connecting Wren's St Paul's to what is to be the new Tate Gallery of Modern Art in the former Bankside Power Station.

These projects represent just the tip of an architectural iceberg. Foster is currently waiting for the green light to begin work on the construction of the Millennium Tower on the site of the Baltic Exchange in the City of London; if it goes ahead it will be the tallest building in Europe by far. The City can expect at least four more sleek

office towers by Foster, while further east along the river Thames in London's Docklands, the Foster-designed tube station for the Jubilee Line extension of the underground is taking shape at Canary Wharf (alongside his projected Citibank tower). If the Millennium Festival goes ahead, visitors to Greenwich in 2000 will arrive at a Foster terminal, if they come by bus or coach. Back in central London, art lovers and tourists enjoy looking at paintings at the Sackler Galleries of the financially embarrassed Royal Academy of Art on Piccadilly; the galleries and the hydraulic glass lift that takes visitors to them are by Foster.

So, too, is the ITN headquarters on Gray's Inn Road between the West End and the City, while nearby an extension to the London School of Economics is on Foster's drawing boards. Within sight of this is the former headquarters of the

Daily Mirror, designed by the great engineer Sir Owen Williams, and for several years the landing-pad for the late Robert Maxwell's helicopter; the building is to be demolished and a replacement, to be called Holborn Place, is on the cards. Sir Norman has already designed it.

He has been working on the new Clarendon Theatre and Basic Medical Science building for Imperial College London, the vast new extension to St Pancras Station, in readiness for a second wave of Eurostar trains, and the new Treasury building in Great George Street, Westminster.

This is an all-encompassing and astonishing list that reflects Foster's inexorable rise from small beginnings with Richard Rogers, Su Rogers and Wendy Cheeseman - they set up in practice in the front room of a small flat in Hampstead nearly 35 years ago - to the inheriting of Wren's.

Naturally Foster's success attracts snide and hostile criticism, and naturally there are those who feel that Sir Norman has quite enough work already, and that some of these prestigious projects should go to younger and fresher talents. Such criticism, however, is unfair; for one thing, many of the brightest young architects in

the country work for Foster, in the hope of rising to become a partner in the firm, or of setting up on their own with a known and respected track record.

For another, Foster is 61, an age when architects, unlike many other professional and business people, are in their prime. Very few architects can count on major commissions until they reach 40; this is because their education is long and when they start out in their late twenties they are only just beginning to get to grips with the complex process of getting a building off the ground.

Wren was still very much at work in his nineties, living to witness the completion of St Paul's Cathedral: Foster has a long way to go yet, whether you approve of his work, or not. And by the time he has run his course, London will be crowded with many more of his buildings.

Curiously, Foster's conquest of the London skyline has been late in coming. At the beginning of the Nineties most of his firm's work was elsewhere in the world, from Hong Kong and Japan via Continental Europe to the United States. However, when London was finally taken up with a major building, the result is a spate of buildings that lift the face of the

capital in radical fashion. Aside from Wren, whose presence - though muted since the Sixties by the sheer scale, if not the quality, of modern commercial architecture - is still impossible to miss or to mistake, there have been other architects who have enjoyed their spell of fame on the London stage.

In the Sixties and Seventies, when Wren churches were dwarfed by brash new office blocks, the distinctive designs of Richard Seifert - "the Colonel", as he has always been known - led the way into the clouds. Seifert's 385ft Centrepoint remains the fulcrum of central London, its highly distinctive beehive facades dating from a period when hairdos of that name were all the rage among the office girls who strutted along Oxford Street and Charing Cross Road in the building's lengthy shadow.

Centrepoint is just one of a swarm of central London buildings by Seifert, and although the Colonel was much criticised in his day, his highly-polished designs have stood the test of time. The criticism was due principally to Seifert's association with Harry Hyams, the litigious developer who built Centrepoint and infamously watched over it while it sat empty for many years, in the hope of a leap in the value of office rents. A vacant monument at the very heart of London made many people very angry. Centrepoint's was the unacceptable facade of capitalism, though it was never a

bad building, and is now rather fashionable. The second reason that Seifert was unpopular was because he seemed a damned sight too good at business to be an architect. In the Sixties, and until recently, the British architect was meant to be a gent, a decent, tweedy type supported by his parents until late in life and with no understanding of time, or interest in money. Seifert was a whizz at both.

Seifert had effectively retired by the time Margaret Thatcher and Nigel Lawson pumped the economy to Schwarzenegger proportions and a spate of massive new commercial monuments rose on the London skyline. Before the bubble burst in 1989, it looked as if Terry Farrell, a skilled architect in thrall to transatlantic Post-Modern design, was about to follow in the tradition of Wren and Seifert. Farrell gave us the operatic offices over Charing Cross Station, the M16 headquarters at Vauxhall and Alban Gate, a broad-shouldered office block over London Wall, as well as the much-publicised headquarters of TV-AM in Camden Town. London was going POMO in a big way, with architects and developers falling over one another to give shape to the bulkiest and brashiest office buildings this side of Chicago. This was when Broadgate was built; Canary Wharf too. These buildings may be brash, but they are well made despite having been rushed up, often within 12 months. They taught

Britain's most creative architects a lesson: in the future - era when the private sector would rule the roost, and old, gentlemanly ways would be the stuff of Merchant Ivory films - the best of them must be as tough and as canny as Seifert and, dare it be said, Sir Christopher Wren.

This combination - creative thinking and commercial acumen - equals Norman Foster. For private-sector clients, Foster is the ideal architect of the age, offering intelligent and sophisticated architecture that is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, at a pace and at a price. His buildings are instantly recognisable and form part of a canon of work which - though inventive and assured - is not as rich as Wren's or as sassy as Seifert's. But Stormin' Norman, as he is known in the profession, has truly taken London by storm.

Architects in the US have known for at least a century how to work in a way that satisfies our desire for noble and even beautiful city-centre buildings and simultaneously makes sense to developers; the skyline of Manhattan, and even more so Chicago, is proof of that. We may not want London to look like Chicago, but our architects are wise to learn its lessons, even if they are doing so slowly. When more of them do, Sir Norman Foster's will be only one of a number of distinguished signatures written in steel and brick, stone and glass across the capital's skyline.



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Spare a thought for Today's barmy army

The people on Radio 4's *Today* programme have asked me to remind you that voting is still open in their Personality of the Year competition. The full list of candidates for the *Today* Programme Personality of the Year is as follows:

□ The Bishop of the West Midlands

The Bishop of the West Midlands is a regular on *Thought for the Day*. Here is a sample quote from one of his recent *Thoughts*: "Like many of us, I was bitterly disappointed not to win anything in the Lottery on Saturday. But then I thought, well, Our Lord never bought a lottery ticket and did He complain? I think not. Did He apply for lottery funds to build his church? I think not. Jesus and his 12 disciples were, in a very real sense, street theatre, but were they subsidised? Of course not. Well, that's all the parallels I can think of between the National Lottery and Jesus, so it's back to Jim."

□ The man who does the sport at 7.25 and again at 8.25

The man who does the sport is sometimes called Gary Richardson and sometimes not, but whatever name he goes under he has been universally praised for never boasting when his racing tips win. Indeed, he never apologises when they do not win. Indeed, nobody ever knows if they win or lose. Indeed, there is a school of thought which says that they are not real horses but names made up by Gary Richardson to avoid controversy. If indeed Gary Richardson is Gary Richardson's real name.

□ Malcolm Rifkind
Malcolm Rifkind is a favourite with many listeners, not for his foreign policy, which nobody can quite identify either, owing to his continuing, heroic and ultimately unavailing struggle to lose his Scottish tongue. In the words of one listener: "Some weeks I think has finally lost it, and achieved that weary Oxbridge Westminster sound, but the next week it comes creeping back again into his strangled voice."



Miles Kingston

Fascinating! Well, compared to what he says, anyway."

□ The expert who has been dragged out of his bed at short notice after a disaster, to explain it to the listeners. All our hearts must go out to this poor man, who is being hauled on to the *Today* programme to help cover last night's big disaster because the *Today* programme feels it has to cover big disasters, even though nobody knows what has happened or what caused it, especially the expert who has been just

dragged from his bed, and who has to face damn fool questions such as, "Well, Mr Osgood, obviously we don't know why this Boeing 747 crashed on take-off killing 350 people, but as editor of *Air Crash Monthly* what would you say is the most likely cause, bearing in mind similar accidents in the past?"

□ The weather forecaster who has to deal with chatty presenters. This is a nomination for bravery. The bravery, that is, of a weather person at the London Weather Centre, waiting with a beautifully polished script which starts something like: "Well, that depression which has covered Britain for two days is finally moving away into the North Sea..." knowing that some would-be informal *Today* presenter is going to ruin your opening by saying, "Well, it's time to go over to Rob Kettleby at the Weather Centre again - so, is it going to rain at the Cup Final, then, Rob?", which makes nonsense of your script. Even worse, if the presenter says, "Well, what chances of

a white Christmas this year?" and the weather person has to resist the temptation to say, "What a damn fool question!"

□ Michael Heseltine. For being the only politician who regularly has the courage to point out to the presenter what a damn fool question he is asking.

□ The man or woman on the *Today* programme who thinks up the damn fool questions. My favourite one is: "So, Minister, what are you going to tell the House this afternoon?" to which the answer is always: "I'm afraid you'll have to wait till this afternoon to find out," though this has never stopped anyone on the *Today* programme from asking it, or indeed its variant: "Minister, I know you can't tell us exactly what you're going to tell the House this afternoon, but can you give us the rough outline of your statement?" to which the answer is exactly the same.

Still time for more nominations, if you can face it!

Labour look

Labour look... (The rest of the text in this column is illegible due to extreme blurriness and high contrast.)

12/12/96

Why the green shopper is not being properly served

Everyone wants to be good. Now there are new and better ways to be good without really trying. If Christmas nausea is setting in and the joy of shopping is wearing thin it is a good time to consider turning shopping into a virtue: you are what you shop. Now we are back in boom times, the late Eighties enthusiasm for eco-ethical-natural-environmental and furry-animal-friendly shopping is on its way back too. Kwik Save values rule in the bad times, ethics are strictly for booms.

So, acquiring information from the *Ethical Consumer* magazine (a workers' co-operative), let us enter the worrying world of the virtuous shopper. Published by the Ethical Consumer Research Association, it carries out audits and delves deep into the background of companies, rooting out the unscrupulous on every front. And there are so many battlefronts: the environment, conditions of workers, links with vile regimes, gay rights, unkindness to animals. It is a kind of *Which?* magazine for the conscience instead of the purse, with reports available on an A-Z of the most ethical choices, from adhesives and airlines to wool and yoghurt.

There are special reports on why not to buy Rayban sunglasses, Pepsi, Nike trainers or Gillette products. Tesco is criticised for "insensitive expansion plans" as is United Biscuits for its (discontinued) contributions to the Conservative Party.

Once you combine all that with health considerations, shopping becomes very tricky indeed. The trouble with ethical boycotts and health scares is that they tend to stay with you for a lifetime. I still instinctively hesitate over Cape oranges or Spanish lemons. (Actually post-Franco Spain is back on the boycott list, "because of cruelty involved in bullfights and village fiestas"). Is it OK to eat Californian table grapes or is the Chavez workers' boycott still on? And what about aluminium saucepans causing Alzheimer's? That one-off scare caused a bigger throw-out of old pans than the war effort and it lingers on in the memory (suggesting you haven't yet developed the dread disease) but then you never hear any more about it. (The Alzheimer's Disease Society says nothing has been proven and they do not recommend throwing out pans.)

Which supermarket should you choose? This is quite complicated. If it means going by car, don't. If you must, then Sainsbury's and the Co-op rank best on environmental policy and factory farming. (The *Ethical Consumer* points out, though, that Sainsbury's is currently the subject of a boycott by Outrage, the gay rights group, because the Sainsbury family trust funds a "Christian Gay-healing" organisation.) A new Sainsbury's has just opened in Clapham High Street, walking distance from my home (good news, though bags v heavy). On the other hand, it was opened by John Major - bad news, except some might rejoice that he is reduced to gigs that are usually the prerogative of Miss UK, 1985.

The *Ethical Consumer* lists 36 current boycotts, ranging from airlines that transport monkeys for research and companies that sponsor angling contests to all Borneo/Israeli/Moroccan/Turkish holidays. Esso is out "for use of a circus tiger in its adverts". Hazelle Down bottled water for being owned by Southern Water, responsible for South



Polly Toynbee

If green products have been discredited for bogus claims, what exactly can the average good shopper do without becoming a ridiculous zealot?

Coast sewage effluent, HSS Hire Shops "in support of a long pay and trade union dispute with ancillary workers of Hillingdon Hospital", all poultry meat is forbidden "for treatment of chickens and turkeys on the way to the slaughterhouse". Walkers crisps for "derecognition of the GMB trade union", Shell for the Ogoni region, Texaco and Total for Ecuadorian Amazon and Burma, and WH Smith and John Menzies "for their sales of soft pornography".

Maybe what the good shopper needs is a handy little ethical shopping computer which checks out any product as you reach for it on the supermarket shelf, with an alarm on the bar code if it rates above a certain number of points. You would need, though, to be able to programme it to suit your own conscience, so that you could give more black marks to perfectly-formed-vegetables-from-Kenya-that-kill-their-workers-with-reckless-insecticide-use than to, say, the Esso circus tiger.

For it turns out that virtuous shopping is not as easy as it seemed. The National Consumer Council recently warned that the public had become wary of so-called green and friendly things that turned out not to be. Sainsbury's and other supermarkets have withdrawn many of their green cleaning products after deciding they were no more environment-friendly than others. Those green products remaining really do make a difference - like recycled lavatory paper.

But the basic truth that no buying is green has seeped through to the consumer. Plastic-wrapped combustion-engine-transported supermarket-sold goods are all expensive in energy. Companies that try to be good often run into public trouble, as with Body Shop and some of its Third World suppliers. Ben and Jerry's Rainforest Crunch ice cream, intended to benefit co-operatives of Brazilian brazil nut workers, had to have its wording changed once it was discovered the very success of the operation had caused the co-operatives to be pushed out by the commercial suppliers.

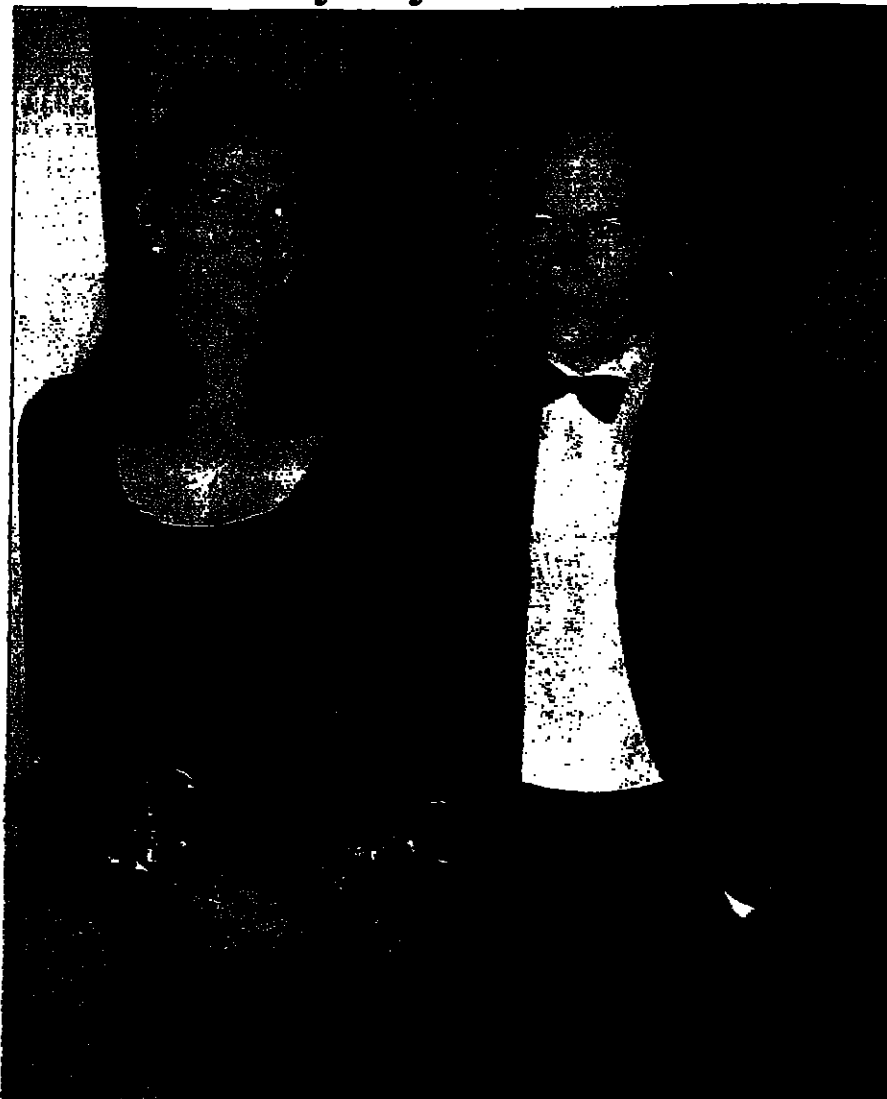
It is all very difficult. Companies that make green or ethical claims have often been exceedingly economical with the truth. On the other hand, companies that genuinely try, do better deserve to be rewarded. There is something absurd about the *Ethical Consumer's* anti-shopping list because it makes no value judgements about what really matters. It lacks a sense of proportion and priority and risks being laughed at - or making people despair at the whole idea.

For some boycotts do work: in the end, business disinvestment brought down apartheid. It is encouraging that the Co-op Bank's ethical investment policy is now paying off, with double the number of new accounts opening in a static market. With 24-hour personal telephone banking and as many cash machines as the others, changing over to the Co-op is virtue easily acquired (though people are more likely to get divorced than change banks in their lifetime). Most of us are unlikely to do anything very strenuous to alter our consumption habits but opinion polls show that increasingly consumers are willing to buy the morally better rather than the worse, if the better is easily available.

Ethical Consumer magazine, Unit 21, 41 Old Birley St, Manchester M15 5RF

Martin Amis: better rich than read

by Boyd Tonkin



Literary riches: Martin Amis with his partner, the American actress Isabel Fonseca

Literary fiction now has its own Cedric Brown fat cats - but are these authors worth their piles of cash?

"Being rich is about acting too, isn't it? A style, a pose, an interpretation that you force upon the world? Whether or not you've made the stuff yourself, you have to set about pretending that you merit it, that money chose right in choosing you, and that you'll do right by money in your turn." Martin Amis, *Money*.

In 1984, the 35-year old Martin Amis published *Money* - still, for many readers, his finest novel - "a suicide note". There must have been times over the past decade when the relative riches that his books have brought (not bad dosh for a scribbler, but peanuts for one of his beloved tennis stars) have seemed like deadly poison. In media eyes, a screen of pound notes - and, since his liaison with the American author and heiress Isabel Fonseca, dollar bills - now make every literary step he takes. Yet, if Amis has become less a novelist than a figurehead for the new rules of engagement between art and commerce, he hasn't shown much desire to quit his post. Year after year, his progress bears out the winner of the *New Statesman's* competition for unlikely book titles: "My Struggle, by Martin Amis".

This week, he returned to Random House's literary imprint Jonathan Cape - his publisher for most of the past 25 years - for a four-book deal reputed to be worth around £1m. A crucial but overlooked side of the contract involves the reversion of Amis's valuable backlist - titles such as *Money*, *London Fields* and *The Rachel Papers* - from Penguin to Vintage paperbackbacks. As well as fiction, the works for Cape may include Amis's own memoir of his *amnis horribilis* of 1985 - when his marriage ended, his father Sir Kingsley died and his life turned into the raw material of a broadsheet soap opera.

Two years ago, he deserted Random House for Rupert Murdoch's HarperCollins in a two-book, £475,000 deal negotiated by his agent, Andrew Wylie - who must be thrilled that journalists call him "The Jackal" as lazily as they dubbed David Wilets "Two Brains".

But *The Information* - the brooding and cloistered novel of bookish rivalry that accounted for the bulk of HarperCollins' investment - did far from brilliantly in the shops. Tom Rosenthal, publisher at André Deutsch, reveals that "the view of the book trade, with access to the wholesale figures, is that *The Information* was a commercial fiasco. One would be very surprised if it earned £100,000, let alone £500,000."

Even so, Amis has joined a tiny super-league of literary big hitters whose career patterns now have more in common with the likes of Andre Agassi than Angus Wilson. Simon Master of Random House may welcome Amis "back to his

rightful home", but the truth is that hot literary properties can now choose to be as mobile as unregulated cash itself.

A hard core of transatlantic agents have hustled this premier division into being. Wylie and Ed Victor are the best known, but publishers react to the pair in sharply contrasting ways. Victor, although a steely negotiator, inspires trust and respect. Wylie, who believes publishers have traditionally sold their leading authors short, elicits less glowing reports. Other figures have helped raise the stakes for a favoured few.

In Britain, the young agent Nick Marston at A.P. Watt has specialised in seven-figure film rights deals for popular novelists such as Philip Kerr (*Gridiron*, *Esau*) and Nicholas Evans (*The Horse Whisperer*). In the US, a precedent was set when Mark McCormack's giant IMG agency - better known for golf and tennis champions - signed

up Donna Tartt for her debut novel, *The Secret History*.

In every corner of the leisure market, from basketball to classical music, the power of the agent has widened the gap in rewards between the fat cats and the rest. And, in the shape of Amis and a handful of others, literary fiction now has its own Cedric Browns. To them that hath, shall be given.

Rosenthal comments that "Whenever this happens, the danger is that anything from two to half-a-dozen perfectly decent mid-list authors will get starved." He adds that such deals represent "a grotesquely macho performance for publishers. These people are never spending their own money, but the shareholders. What they're saying is that 'my shlong is bigger than yours'."

Accountancy aside, is Amis worth this rising mound of cash? As a stunningly original phrase-maker with a drip-feed

from the Spirit of the Age, he has few rivals. Dickenson grotesques with a knotted argot all their own stalk his pages, their feral humour rooted in a very English comedy of manners. If a writer such as Nick Hornby - with his earnest, decent aspirations - embodies Dr Jekyll for thousands of young-to-middle-aged professionals, Amis does a good job of summoning their Mr Hyde.

Fiasco or not, *The Information's* obsessive dwelling on the mutual dynamics of success

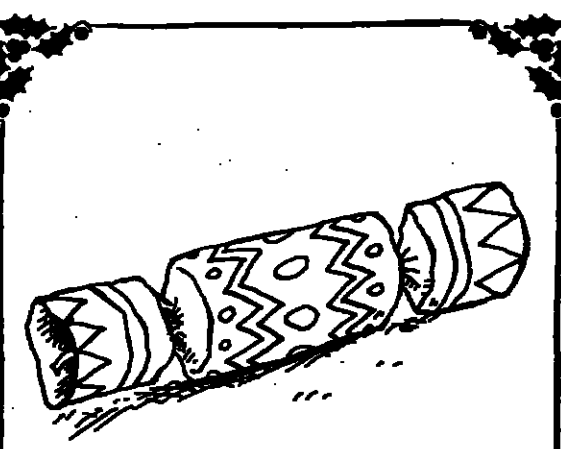
and failure hit some sore spots on its readers. One of the novel's running gags concerns a vast, ungainly book by Richard Tull, its floundering wash-out of a writer. His manuscript provokes migraines and fevers in anyone unlucky enough to clap eyes on it. Oddly enough, *The Information* itself had just that effect. Its vision of life as a savage Darwinian zoo, where winning and losing alone matter, felt cramped and mean - but still struck some nerve-jangling chords.

Yet, in place of the strenuous wrangles found in Amis' favourites such as Saul Bellow, his own quest for the Big Picture amounts to a few vague, cosmological ideas about entropy and a pervasive, rather whiny fear of death. As a moral superstructure, this looks about as fragile as the peeling stucco of the socially polarised North Kensington streets where his books were set and written.

"Wonderful gargoyles; lousy architecture," wrote George Orwell about Dickens. A mid-career verdict on Amis might come to the same conclusion. No character could conjure up his age more vividly than Keith Talent, the horribly funny darts-playing thug from *London Fields*, with a TV sports commentary constantly playing in his head. Yet that book falls apart into an opaque and mis-handled approximation of a murder plot. It sounds encouraging that the new Cape deal's first fruit will be a compact mystery to be entitled *Night Train*. Hints at its content suggest something akin to *Other People*, the tightly-plotted 1982 thriller that remains Amis's most satisfying structure so far.

"Every writer," Amis once wrote, "hopes or boldly assumes that his life is in some sense exemplary." If he didn't exist, a culture avid to treat literature as a branch of showbiz would probably have to invent him. All the same, he shows no sign of wanting to withdraw from the scrum.

Henry James once wrote a spooky tale in which a famous author splits into two personas, the social lion and the toiling recluse. For the sake of his future work, the Amis who haunts the Centre Court (and the front pages) should break up with the gifted stylist whose books get all dressed up, and then have nowhere to go. But it may never happen in a climate that, as the price of fame, forbids authors the right to invent even the width of one of Keith Talent's grubby tenners between their Life and Works.



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Labour looks less liberal as power looms

Many people will be suspicious when Jack Straw, the Shadow Home Secretary, today announces details of a human rights law for Britain. These days, home secretaries and wannabes such as Mr Straw prefer to strike Rambo poses as the hard men of government. It's difficult to imagine them losing much sleep over human rights.

Mr Straw has, after all, backed provisions in Michael Howard's Police Bill that would allow extensive electronic surveillance of individuals without a warrant. It is Jack Straw who seeks to wage war against that dreadful threat to the future of the western society - the squeegee person, who wants to wash your windscreen while you wait at the traffic lights. And if Mr Straw gets into power, troublesome youngsters should expect to find themselves subject to curfews.

In short, Mr Straw sounds like a far more illiberal figure than, for example, Roy Jenkins, Labour's finest and most progressive Home Secretary. Yet Mr Straw apparently plans to do for liberalism what even Jenkins failed to achieve - incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into British law. At a stroke, our own courts would at last be entitled to test laws passed by Parliament against, for example, the rights to life, liberty, security and freedom of expression. We have, since 1952, been subject to these provisions. But the difference, under Labour's plans, is that the aggrieved would no longer have to wait five or six years until the European Court in Strasbourg judged their complaint.



Jack O'Sullivan

Opposition plans to entrench human rights in British law are not as radical as they seem. Ministers, not judges, will still have the last word

They could seek a domestic remedy.

If Mr Straw enacts his proposals, the British judiciary could subject future governments to even more embarrassment than Michael Howard has been experiencing. The first British laws up for challenge could include the proposed new rules on police surveillance (which may infringe the right to privacy), Diane Blood's inability to obtain her dead husband's sperm for IVF treatment (right to found a family), refusal to provide the same state subsidies for Muslim schools as offered to Anglicans and Catholics (freedom of religion) and tight restrictions on legal aid (the right to a fair trial).

Today's discussion paper suggests that a joint committee of the Commons and the Lords should be established to ensure that future legislation is consistent with the convention. And Labour says it would consider the establishment of a Human Rights Commission, advocated by the left-leaning Institute for Public Policy Research, to support legal challenges in much the same way as do the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

But before civil libertarians drive round all night sounding their horns at an historic victory, they should read the small print. They will discover that Mr Straw's proposals turn out to be less liberal than they seem, because Labour's would-be Home Secretary has remained true to the time-honoured principle that Britain is ruled by an elected dictatorship, subordinate to none but the electorate once every five

years, and certainly not to judges or a constitutional convention.

It is the government of the day, not the judiciary, that would be given the ultimate responsibility by Mr Straw to enforce the convention's "rights". Nowhere does today's discussion document say that the judges could strike down a law judged in breach of the convention. That provision, which existed in earlier drafts of the document, has been dropped by Mr Straw.

Instead, where the judges discover a breach of the convention, "consideration will need to be given by the government of the day and Parliament as to what action should be taken". What this seems to mean is that judges are entitled only to knock on a minister's door and say "Hey, we think you've made a mistake", and let Parliament (controlled by the government of the day) take over from there. This may be a big improvement on the status quo, but hardly a revolution in the rights of the individual vis-à-vis the state. Especially since, under the proposals, Parliament would also retain the right to pass laws which unambiguously broke the convention, provided that intention was clearly stated at the time of legislating.

The result of all this is that Mr Straw's plans leave British citizens still prey to maverick government, to ministers who, if enjoying a large enough majority in Parliament, could say to hell with the judges and the convention and do so with impunity, at least in the short run.

Compared with the "rights" other countries enjoy, entrenched in their

constitutions, enforceable by the courts and almost impossible to change or ignore, Mr Straw's proposals add little to the individual's personal autonomy. They look radical only in comparison with Tory unwillingness to contemplate even this modest measure.

It's not difficult to see why Labour has changed its tune. Under John Smith the party was committed to creating a Bill of Rights tailor-made for Britain. Such a reform may have seemed attractive when the party was in opposition and the Tories were creating an all-powerful central government in Westminster. But once Tony Blair succeeded to the leadership and the polls began to give Labour a whiff of coming power, retreat was ordered. A new Bill of Rights, which could hinder a Labour government's freedom of action, was quietly dropped and the party went instead for the less ambitious goal of incorporating the European Convention. Now, just as Labour looks set to take over the government front benches, the idea of limiting the executive's power looks even less attractive. Hence Mr Straw's latest watered-down proposal.

Is there any hope that Jack Straw will rise to the challenge of genuinely and irrevocably limiting state power? The signs are discouraging. There is, as today's document demonstrates, a struggle going on between Labour's liberal and illiberal tendencies. But if the liberal side fails to triumph in Opposition, it certainly will lose out when the party takes over our elected dictatorship.



COMMENT

'So far, 111 reports have been published and although we still await two of the most interesting – those into the Maxwell scandal and the Guinness affair – publication has served a public service'

Case for still sending in the DTI inspectors

Ernest Saunders' victory before the European Court of Human Rights has done no favours for the system of sending in DTI inspectors to get to the root of corporate corruption and maladministration. But the judgment should not obscure the fact that they remain an important part of the apparatus for determining blame and then finding remedies when things go pear-shaped, as they so often do in commercial life.

The use of DTI inspectors was never intended to be an aid to the successful prosecution of those charged with breaking the law. However, it became so as the ever-zealous Michael Howard piloted the Financial Services Act onto the statute books. Instead, the purpose of DTI investigations was to serve as post-mortems and get to the bottom of some murky affairs. Hence their powers to compel witnesses to give evidence under pain of imprisonment which lay behind Mr Saunders' appeal to the court.

These powers have now been conferred on the Serious Fraud Office for the purposes of pursuing prosecutions. But that does not alter the need to retain DTI inspectors. So far, 111 reports by DTI inspectors have been published and although we still await two of the most interesting – those into the Maxwell scandal and the Guinness affair itself – publication serves a public service. It is one of the few, unvarnished ways of getting at the truth behind corporate failure and one of the best means of informing practice and law to prevent future re-occurrences.

Save for the Bank of England's self-serving report on the Barings fiasco, we will probably never definitively know who was to blame for the collapse of Britain's oldest merchant bank. Likewise, in the absence of DTI inspectors, we may never get to the bottom of the Morgan Grenfell scandal, even if the SFO does decide to proceed.

In the Guinness case the European Court may have ruled that the use to which DTI inspectors' evidence was put denied Mr Saunders a fair trial. But that does not detract from the important role they should continue to play.

A super regulator has few followers

One of the bodies that has attempted to discover the truth behind the Barings collapse is the Commons Treasury Select Committee. Its report, published last night, contrasts sharply with the fierce exchanges witnessed when the MPs were taking evidence from the Bank of England and the other dramatis personae.

Gone is all the vituperative personal criticism of the players in the drama and in its place is a measured and serious piece of work that showed that after a series of inquiries into Johnson Matthey Bankers, BCCI and now Barings the committee is able to get a grip on the technical issues of banking supervision.

The members include Brian Sedgmore, the Labour veteran on the committee who cut his teeth – mainly on the neck of Lord Kingsdown, then Robin Leigh-Pemberton, Governor of the Bank of England – during the mid-80s inquiries into JMB.

The committee is extremely critical of the Bank – and deservedly so. The last time the same Lord Kingsdown appeared before it he was to explain how much sharper the supervision department had got at doing its job in the wake of the BCCI scandal. Then Barings happened.

But the committee has drawn back from recommending that the Bank should lose responsibility for supervision, instead leaving it in the air as a threat in case things don't improve. This question of whether to break up the Bank is one that has had even the Labour Party backing steadily away, as it researched the complications of rebuilding the supervision system almost from scratch. The strongest argument in favour has always been that when the Bank's supervision arm fails, it indirectly damages its reputation for conducting monetary policy, something that has taken on more importance as the Governor acquires more influence over the Chancellor in setting interest rates.

The committee is right to point out the cultural problem of having the supervisor too closely close to its charges. Indeed, long term, there is an attractive logic in proposals for a new super regulator covering both securities and banking – two industries that are

merging rapidly. But as the MPs' restrained comments show, support for that proposition is now muted on both sides of the house.

Back to the days of honky-Tonks

Just as everyone else is doing the splits, having decided that conglomerates are out and "focused" businesses are in, along comes a blast from the past to turn back the clock. Jeff Whalley is best remembered as part of the duo at FKI that blazed an acquisition trail across the industrial landscape in the 1980s until it came horribly unstuck with the reverse takeover of contracting group Babcock.

Well, Mr Whalley is back with another partner and this time FKI's target is the sleepy old maker of architectural hardware (doorknobs to you and me), Newman Tonks, which yesterday found itself on the wrong end of a £196m bid.

Naturally, Mr Whalley and his new partner, Bob Beeston, eschew any suggestion that the bid is a throwback to the conglomerate-happy days of the Eighties when you were only as good as your last and preferably hostile bid.

FKI, they insist, is a reformed character – an international manufacturing group focused on a range of complementary businesses. Whilst it is true, amazingly enough, that this is FKI's first hostile bid, its portfolio of businesses would nevertheless

appear to fit the description of conglomerate unless there is some connection between car headlights, conveyor belts and castors that the rest of us have missed.

The rationale for the bid, in as much as one exists, is that by welding together Newman Tonks with FKI's existing hardware group it will create a business that merits the word "core". In reality, it is an opportunist offer. Newman Tonks has performed abysmally on most measures of shareholder return. So much so, in fact, that its biggest institutional investor, M&G, has already thrown in the towel with gusto, irrevocably undertaking in vote its 11 per cent stake in favour of the offer even if a higher bid comes along. For a shareholder that normally backs incumbent management to the hilt, that speaks volumes about the current leadership of Newman Tonks.

For its part, Newman Tonks, has already begun making noises about a white knight – a sure sign of desperation when the offer document has not even been posted and the bid clock is yet to start.

Mr Whalley has already splashed out £260m this year on an Italian manufacturer of car alternators, an electrical power business and another doorknob maker – all in the name of focus, of course.

The combination of a hungry predator, a disillusioned shareholder and an indifferent track record is not the most auspicious platform from which to launch a defence of Newman Tonks.

BT goes to court over watchdog's new powers

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Telecom yesterday began its long-awaited High Court challenge against controversial moves by Don Cruickshank, the industry regulator, to take on wide-ranging powers to ban anti-competitive behaviour.

However, as the judicial review got under way it emerged that Mr Cruickshank could reopen a tough four-year price regime for BT's residential customers, which he has tied to the new fair trading powers, if the company won the court case.

An OfTel spokesman confirmed that the regulator could look again at the price formula, which cuts domestic phone bills by 4.5 per cent a year from next August until July 2001. It also excludes almost all business customers for the first time on the grounds that competition in the business phone market is already well established.

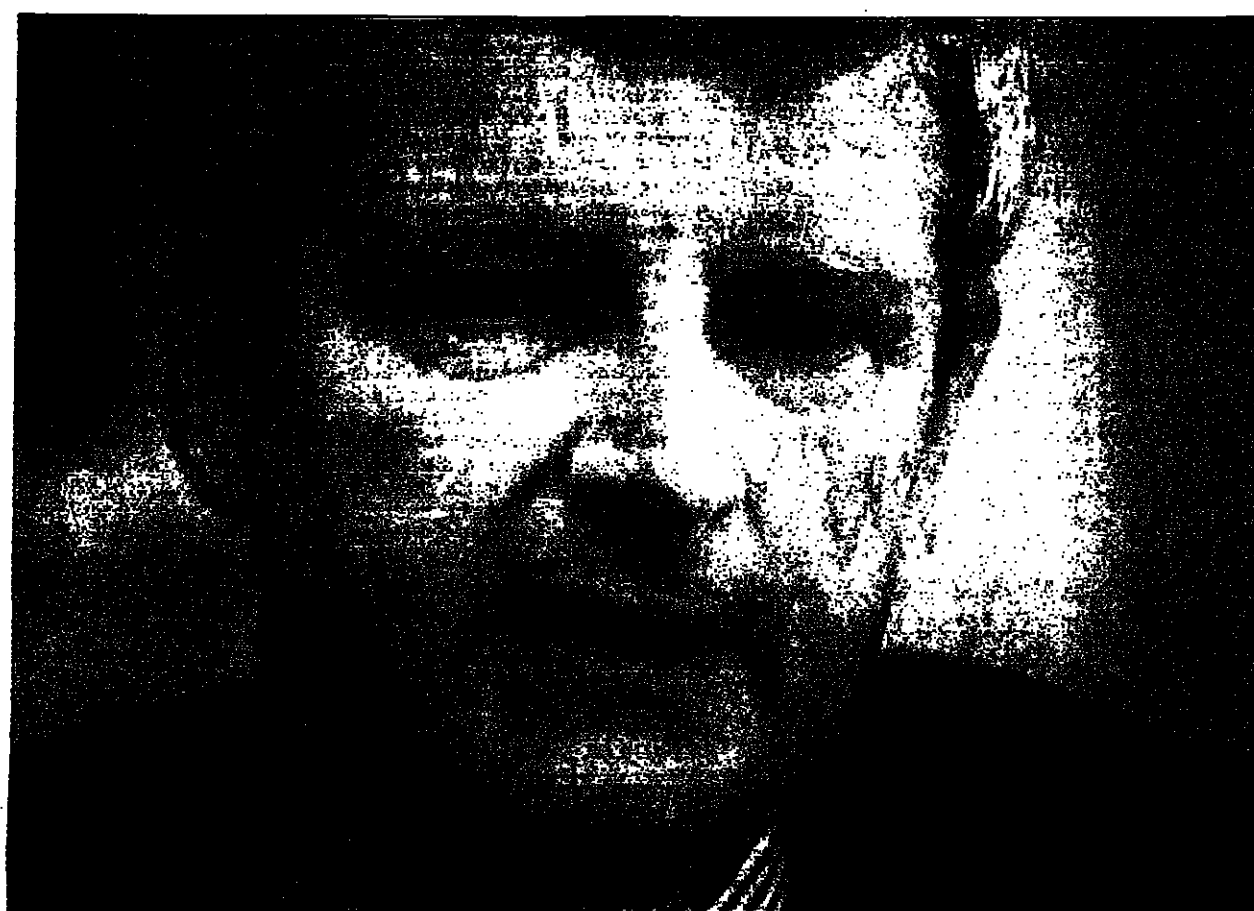
In court Roger Henderson QC, representing BT, attacked the new licence conditions which he claimed would give Mr Cruickshank much wider powers than those envisaged by

Parliament when it passed the law which defined the role of OfTel, the watchdog, at privatisation in 1984.

The outcome of the judicial review is also likely to influence the future direction of the UK regulatory system and has implications for the Government's broader competition policy. The proposals draw heavily from European competition law, which the Government has recently delayed introducing into the UK.

The new powers, which come into effect from 31 December, enable Mr Cruickshank to move much more quickly on any action by BT or other telecoms companies which he decided was anti-competitive. They would replace the current system based on many individual licence conditions designed to stamp out specific actions such as the requirement to provide itemised billing for customers or a system for making calls to the emergency services.

BT accepted the measures in the summer at the eleventh hour, narrowly averting a full-blown investigation by the Monopolies and Mergers



Test case: Don Cruickshank's proposed powers draw heavily on European competition law and the outcome of the judicial review will have implications for the Government's broader competition policy

Commission, in one of the most bitter disputes ever between the company and its regulator.

Approval by BT came after Sir Peter Bonfield, chief executive, secured what he claimed was a key concession, where Cruickshank agreed to appoint an advisory board to vet his decisions. However, the group of four experts, which will be chaired by Jeremy Lever QC, a former leading competition lawyer, has no power to enforce

any of its recommendations. In court yesterday BT labelled the advisory group a "shadow of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission" with no power to make binding rulings.

Describing the advisory board as a "neutered body", Mr Henderson argued that "checks and balances are not what they appear".

Though BT has accepted the new powers and the package of price controls, the company claimed it had a duty to mount

the legal challenge to protect its shareholders. The action is supported by Vodafone, Britain's leading mobile phone operator, which believes the changes concentrate too much power in the hands of one person.

The main thrust of BT's attack was on the scale and subjective nature of Mr Cruickshank's new powers, which the company claimed would elevate him above the existing overall competition watchdog, the Office of Fair Trading. Indulging in liberal cricketing metaphors, Mr Henderson said: "Effectively we're getting a second wicket keeper."

He claimed OfTel would inevitably regard BT "as in a dominant position across the board" because of its near monopoly of local domestic telephone services. The burden would constantly be on BT to prove its strategy was not designed to thwart competition.

IN BRIEF

Eurotherm goes for growth

Eurotherm, the instrumentation to motor controls group, said it could handle up to £100m of acquisitions as it announced a switch to a more acquisitive growth strategy. The move is a triumph for Claes Hultman, the chief executive who resigned and was then reinstated earlier this year after a row over strategy with then chairman Jack Leonard. The company revealed the boardroom spat had cost £300,000 in fees to ING Barings and other advisers. New chairman Sir James Mann confirmed that non-executive directors Rhys Williams and Sid Taylor would retire at February's annual meeting, along with the former chairman, but said there would be no pay-offs for loss of office. *Investment Column, page 16*

Green light for Ciba/Sandoz merger

The two Swiss drug giants Ciba and Sandoz cleared the last hurdle to their £34bn merger when the US authorities approved the deal. The Federal Trade Commission gave conditional approval for the merger, which will create the world's second-largest pharmaceutical group after Glaxo Wellcome, to be called Novartis. Clearance is subject to the two companies licensing out or divesting several product areas.

Surprise cut in French rates

The Banque de France cut its key intervention rate yesterday by 5 basis points to 3.15 per cent, taking the financial markets by surprise. The move was seen as symbolic, as it was too small to have much impact on the economy. The central bank also announced that its monetary targets for 1997 would be unchanged.

Higgs & Hill sells construction arm

Higgs & Hill yesterday sold its struggling construction division to focus on its property and housebuilding activities. The sale of the construction arm for £28.5m to Hollandsche Beton Groep gives the company cash proceeds of £6m but means it surrenders rights to the Higgs & Hill name and will now be known as Swan Hill. George Duncan, chairman, said: "As a medium-sized general contractor, the construction division has been increasingly at a disadvantage in a market which is consolidating into major international contractors with large balance sheets and small contractors working off low cost bases."

Sherwood warns of lower profits

Sherwood Group said pre-tax profits for the second half of 1996 would be appreciably less than the £3.75m made in the first half, after incurring or providing for exceptional reorganisational costs for the full year of £3.1m, of which £800,000 relates to the first half. The company said indications for 1997 were more encouraging and it is proposed to maintain the dividend for the year ended December 1996 at the same level as for 1995. Sherwood's shares fell 17p to 41.5p.

P&O appoints Mobbs to Bovis

Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co said it had appointed Sir Nigel Mobbs as non-executive chairman of its wholly owned subsidiary Bovis Homes. Bovis is due to float on the stock market in 1997. Sir Nigel is chairman and chief executive of Slough Estates and is on the board of Barclays.

Coats shares up after warning

Coats Vytella closed 5p higher at 127p as analysts expressed relief that a trading statement yesterday was "not worse". Coats warned it would be taking a £55m restructuring charge in the current year but said underlying operating profits would emerge "similar" to last year's.

United Biscuits sells Ross vegetables for £44m

Magnus Grimond

United Biscuits, the snacks to frozen goods group, yesterday took another step towards focusing its business with a £44m deal to sell its Ross Vegetable Products operation to management.

The deal comes just about a year after the group sold its troubled Keebler business in the US and is being seen as the latest attempt by the chief executive, Eric Nicol, to reverse the declining fortunes of the group.

It will result in a £32m write off of goodwill and £19m of capitalised brand value.

The Ross operation was identified as non-core earlier this year after a reorganisation of the whole frozen and chilled foods operation to focus on "priority markets". The limited marketing and investment in the business, which includes the Ross frozen vegetable brand and Oriental Express ready meals, has left it lagging behind rivals such as Bird's Eye, Tendafrast, Findus and Heinz.

Although better-known in the north of England and Scotland, a spokesman said yesterday: "It has been very much the poor relation to Bird's Eye and has been very clearly non-core for some time, although it has been performing well recently."

United Biscuits' shares, which have been in more or less continuous decline since a peak of 434p in 1993, edged down another 0.5p to 197.5p yesterday. Analysts generally welcomed the deal, but said it was not unexpected.

One said that in recent years United Biscuits had concentrated on differentiating its frozen foods business by specific markets, such as the Linda McCartney range of vegetarian meals, San Marco pizzas and Young's Seafood. "Basically, I don't think they would claim that frozen vegetables is a great value-added sector," he said. It is understood that the management-led group beat a number of other offers after Ross was "reasonably widely marketed" to possible buyers,

although it is thought Bird's Eye, part of Unilever, might have faced competition problems in completing a deal. The winning group, RVP Foods, a specially-formed company, is backed by the private equity arm of the Union Bank of Switzerland. Of the total £44m consideration, £2m is deferred. Ross had operating profits of £6.2m on sales of £56.1m in 1995 and net assets of £11.4m last December. But one analyst suggested that level of profitability was not likely to be sustained, pointing to the distorting effect of higher potato prices following the drought that year. Although there will be some earnings dilution in the short term from the sale, United Biscuits is thought to concur that Ross has reached peak profitability. The proceeds of the deal will be used to reduce net borrowings which stood at £387m in July.

The Ross Vegetable business was acquired in 1988 with Ross Young's, the food operation of Imperial Group.

Retuning may cost Pearson £180m

Mathew Horsman
Media Editor

Pearson, the media and information company, will today detail a higher-than-forecast budget for the retuning of video recorders for the new Channel 5 service, with estimates ranging to as high as £180m. That would compare with the original budget of £55m, and the subsequent forecasts of £120m.

Pearson's share of the retuning costs could be about £45m, reflecting its 24 per cent interest in the new terrestrial service. The figure will be included in an eagerly awaited trading statement from the media, leisure and financial services conglomerate, which is expected to concentrate on news from the US and UK book publishing businesses.

Pearson is expected to say that its US Penguin subsidiary has largely avoided the troubling trend in the United States toward a high level of returns from

retailers, because of its "just-in-time" printing arrangements.

Analysts did not expect any further news on Mindscape, the ill-starred CD-Rom and game cartridge manufacturer, which is expected to make losses of up to £46m this year. The problems at Mindscape were first revealed in a trading statement a year ago.

Analysts' estimates for the full year vary widely, from just £280m to as high as £370m, reflecting differing expectations on write-downs and other items. Pearson's sprawling assets, which include Madame Tussaud, the Financial Times, 50 per cent of the Economist, Thames Television and Addison-Wesley-Longman, the educational publishing group, have often led to confusing results, depending on how the earnings are stated by the company. The television subsidiary, grouping Thames, Grundy Worldwide, SelecTV and ACL, was expected to have performed strongly in 1996.

Low pay and insecurity common in small firms

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

The much-trumpeted success of small companies as the job-creating lifeblood of the economy is called into question by new research today.

The world of the smallest enterprises is "exceptionally turbulent" with only one in two surviving more than three years, and providing jobs which offer poor pay and minimal training, according to Alan Hughes, director of Cambridge University's ESRC Centre for Business Research.

He explicitly contradicts Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade, who claims that "small firms have been the principal source of new jobs in this country for many years".

In a paper published by the Employment Policy Institute, Mr Hughes reports that "only a handful" of small and medium-

sized enterprises (SMEs) show signs of consistent employment expansion. The chances of survival of the "micro-business" employing fewer than five people were "slim".

Innovative firms were more likely to survive and those who built up collaborative relationships with suppliers and universities.

The evidence, which parallels recent research in the United States, does not support ministerial assertions that the small business sector is the lifeblood of the economy, providing the new ideas, products and services.

"Do we really want to continue the recent trends in the UK of encouraging the creation of large numbers of micro-firms, which offer low wages, insecure jobs with low skills? Or do we want to foster an SME sector strong on innovation, stable growth and high skills?" Mr Hughes writes.

He said it was a challenge to Government to find out why so few enterprises succeeded. Ministers should discover ways of encouraging the firms to do better and to create businesses with the capacity to innovate and offer stable employment.

The research found that the overall net growth of 400,000 businesses between 1980 and 1991 was the difference between 2.1 million registrations and 1.7 million deregistrations. Around one in 10 businesses left the VAT registers in any one year in the 1980s. "Within this turbulent world the very smallest firms are six times more likely to leave the register than the rest," the report says.

Around 60 per cent of those leaving the register each year had done so because of business failure. Only 55 per cent of newly registered enterprises survived to three years and 35 per cent to six years.

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Snooze outweighs booze at Vaux

Sir Paul Nicholson must wonder what he has to do to satisfy the City. The chairman of Vaux would never show it, but he is understandably irritated by the persistent view in the City that the company is nothing more than a regional brewer supplying a tired chain of tenanted pubs in a depressed area of the country. Record profits in the 12 months to September were rewarded by a 5p fall in the share price to 252.5p, a discount even to net assets.

Those results saw pre-tax profits rise 9 per cent to a best-ever £34.8m (£31.5m), earnings per share were also the best the group has achieved at 19.35p and the dividend, which has grown every year since 1969, edged ahead from 10.2p to 10.6p.

As with all misleading perceptions, the prevailing view of Vaux, however, has a grain of truth at its centre. The area around the company's Sunderland base has suffered enormous de-industrialisation and its 749 tenancies include a long tail of dingy boozers in areas no pub chain would choose now. The transfer of a senior manager from the 103-strong managed pub chain to tenancies is a tacit admission that the company has been slow to churn the bottom end of the estate.

As a result, profits from tenancies, still a significant contributor to the group total, fell 12 per cent to £12.9m, taking the shine off a good performance from managed outlets, up 17 per cent to £21.9m, and brewing, where returns rose 27 per cent to £4.5m despite another forced widening of discounts to both tenants and free trade landlords. Brewing has benefited from cost-cutting and plainly has a future as a niche player in an increasingly consolidating market.

Beer is only half the picture at Vaux, however, a fact sometimes overlooked by investors. The snooze side of the equation is arguably much more attractive than the booze, with the Swallow Hotels chain consistently winning plaudits for the quality of its 30 mainly four-star sites. Profits in the year rose £4.3m to £24.1m, after occupancy levels increased from 68 to 72 per cent.

The hotel cycle should have a way to run yet and two new hotels in Liverpool and Huntingdon should keep the momentum going. Sir Paul maintains that the costs involved would not be justified by the benefits in rating terms of demerging the two sides of the group, but it is an issue that management will have to keep under consideration if the shares continue to languish.

On the basis of forecast profits of £37.5m, the shares trade on a prospec-

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

live price/earnings ratio of 12, and offer a yield of 5.5 per cent. Against a backdrop of such slow growth, neither ratio makes the shares look particularly attractive compared with rivals Greene King and Wolverhampton & Dudley.

Heat turned up on Eurotherm

Eurotherm chief executive Claes Hultman walks on hallowed ground, and that is not just a reference to his other job as chairman of Wembley. Such is his veneration in the City that shareholders forced the controls and instrumentations company to take him back earlier this year after he stormed out following an acrimonious and very public tiff with the then chairman.

But the aggravation and the £300,000 fees paid to ING Barings and other advisers as a result of that dispute are a flea-bite compared with the challenge Mr Hultman now faces.

Pre-tax profits up 11 per cent at £37.7m in the year to October represent a significant slow-down from the

30 per cent or more growth which Mr Hultman has typically managed to squeeze out of the business in the six years he has been there.

Combined with news of tougher trading ahead, particularly in the US, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, the shares reacted with a 20p fall to 540p yesterday.

All the damage last year was concentrated in the dominant controls and instrumentation business, where around half the £900,000 profits shortfall to £23.4m was due to the closure of a contract electronics operation in the US.

The problem facing Eurotherm is that the market for traditional temperature controls and paper chart recorders for sewage plants, process industries and the like is either mature or in decline, while it takes two or three years for its new leading edge products to kick in.

Those will perform in future, but it is clear the days of dramatic margin improvement at the group are over, which explains the new-found concentration on acquisitions. With cash representing a third of shareholders' funds, Eurotherm could comfortably

spend up to £100m over the next 18 months or so on one or several buys. There is no reason Mr Hultman should not manage this new phase of the company's development as well as the past. But if the pound remains at current levels, profits might be pushed to exceed £41.5m this year. Standing on a prospective multiple of 18, the shares could mark time until the future becomes clearer.

Securicor slide surprises City

It is more than six months since Securicor, the security and Cellnet mobile phone group, swept away its archaic shareholding structure and entered the real world to the plaudits of the City. Since then, however, investors have experienced anything but the rosy outcome predicted by some brokers. The shares promptly slid from 318p to a low of less than 250p and, despite three attempts to recover over the summer and autumn, added just 1.5p to 261.5p yesterday.

Given the encouraging 8 per cent surge in pre-tax profits to £107.4m reported yesterday for the year to the end of September, this is surprising. Earnings rose 12 per cent to £116m, pointing to the strong impact of a high street-led recovery on Securicor's diverse businesses, which include collecting cash from retailers, delivering goods to retailers and the mobile phone market.

One reason for the forecast rise in profits is that the group has apparently managed to sustain increases in prices in most of its key businesses. The price war that so damaged the mobile phone market early this year seems to have petered out, while Securicor has resisted matching price cuts in its security businesses.

But the company's earnings are dominated by the 40 per cent stake in Cellnet, which contributed £76.6m to annual profits, an increase of 8.5 per cent. Since the Government blocked the sale of the Cellnet stake to BT last year, it gives investors a dilemma - Securicor is worth much more in pieces than it is as a whole.

The Cellnet stake could net as much as £2bn, against Securicor's current market value of less than £1.6bn. Directors have floated the idea of selling the Cellnet shareholding to an outside bidder, but without BT to bid the price this is unlikely. Shareholders can hope for the boost from organic growth, but the big prize seems as far off as ever.

Vaux Group: at a glance

Market value: £366.8m; share price: 252.5p

Five Year record	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
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Revenue (£m)	252.4	254.9	269.8	271.2	284.8
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Pre-tax profits (£m)	20.4	25.9	29.8	31.8	34.8
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Earnings per share (pence)	19.35	20.9	23.8	25.2	27.1
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Dividends per share (pence)	9.35	9.50	9.65	10.2	10.6
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Profit by Activity (before central costs)					
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Managed houses	£9.0m				
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Nursing homes	£3.7m				
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Swallow hotels	£24.1m				
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Brewing & wholesaling	£4.5m				
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Tenancies	£12.9m				
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Share price					
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1991	280				
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1992	260				
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1993	240				
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1994	220				
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1995	200				
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1996	180				
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1997	160				
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1998	140				
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1999	120				
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2000	100				
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2001	80				
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2002	60				
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2003	40				
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2004	20				
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2005	0				
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2006	0				
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2007	0				
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2008	0				
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2009	0				
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2010	0				
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2011	0				
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2012	0				
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2013	0				
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2014	0				
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2015	0				
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2016	0				
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2017	0				
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2018	0				
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2019	0				
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2020	0				
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2036	0				
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2037	0				
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When the top brass are all at sea

PEOPLE & BUSINESS



In training: Ian Reynolds, BT's second-in-command

BT and Commercial Union will be without some of their top brass in the new year thanks to the BT Global Challenge yacht race.

The year-long jaunt started from Southampton in July and reaches Wellington in a fortnight. BT's deputy chief executive, Dr Alan Rudge, will fly out for the week-long sail from Wellington to Sydney. Commercial Union's general manager, Ian Reynolds, will also join the trip, which has been arranged to coincide with CU's annual board meeting in Sydney.

Let people think this is an out-and-out junket (which it is) Mr Reynolds has been doing some rigorous training.

He has recently spent five days in Cornwall where the regime included a day sail followed by a four- or five-mile run and a nice refreshing dip in the sea. So keen is Mr Reynolds to play down his elevated position in CU's corporate hierarchy (he is the insurance giant's number two) that he set his colleagues down at the beginning of the training session and told them he was to be called "Ian" all the way and none of this "Mr General Manager, Sir" nonsense. In an attempt at Archie-Norman style man-of-the-people management, he has also had an "Ian" label attached to his weatherproofs with another understatement saying "Not the general manager".

Michael Spencer, head of City moneybrokers Inter-capital, has kept up his tradition of unusual Christmas cards. This year's effort is a full-colour 12-page "magazine" compiled in the style of teenage girls' magazines. Called *Mine & Yours*, the lavishly produced publication includes a *Jackie* magazine-style picture story called "Alexandrella - a modern love story in pictures". This features a red-dressed youngster and her pursuit of

her beau at a party. The key roles were played by real-life inter-capital brokers Alex Dunkop and John Cicale. The tale ends with the two collapsing into each other's arms in a romantic finale. Touchingly, the two are now engaged.

Meanwhile, Mr Spencer, who is on holiday in Australia, is continuing his penchant for dressing up in strange clothing. At the inter-capital Christmas party last week at the Whitechapel art gallery, the theme was Friday 13th and he turned up wearing a white tux, black velvet cape and top hat.

The British Retail Consortium has found a new director general to replace James May who is off to the UK Offshore Operators Association. Ann Robinson will take up the post from 2 January in a move which represents a big departure from a largely civil service career. Ms Robinson spent most of her career as a civil servant including three years in a government think-tank in the 1970s. More recently she has been chief executive of the Spastics Society, now Scope.

Brussels bureaucrats are making the big switch from American Express to Visa after a change of policy by the good burghers of the European Commission.

Up to 5,000 cards will be issued to the army of Euro paper shufflers who will not notice any immediate difference. Until they come to claim their expenses.

Visa claims its more sophisticated software will enable it to provide mandarins of the Commission with a much more comprehensive breakdown of their minions' spending.

They will be able to monitor trends and check that the drones are travelling on the right airline and generally behaving themselves.

Foreign trips and booze orders will be the subject of particular scrutiny, I understand. The Commission and Visa are trumpeting other benefits yesterday such as better rates of interest and that Visa cards were accepted in three times as many locations as American Express. But the real reason is an expenses crackdown. And just before Christmas too.



INDEPENDENT FANTASY FOOTBALL

LATEST RESULTS AND TOP 50 TEAMS

Top Fifty LEAGUE TABLE

CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 17 AUGUST - 8 DECEMBER

POS.	NAME	TEAM	POINTS
1	MR JOHN COX	SOUTHWILL FC	518
2	MR PETER FRANKENTAL	JOSE MARTI	511
3	MR JONATHAN MCCOEN	WASH TFC	504
4	MR PAUL RICHARDSON	CINCINNATI STORM	504
5	MR R PRINGLE	DEPODALE VILLA 7	497
6	MR SIMON DRAPER	FLATE FC	497
7	MR ANDREW BURMAN	WIRRELDON STUNO HEADS	497
8	MR STROUD		495
9	MR ADAM HOGG	BLAGDY HOGG	494
10	MR DARREN GREEN	FOR THE AZURE	494
11	MR CHRIS SCOTT	BRUCE LBS FC	492
12	MR S A SCOTT	FOREIGN BACKBONE	492
13	MR JONATHAN FURNISS	REDSTAR CARDIFF	489
14	MR NICK KNIGHT	KNIGHT'S NANA HEAD	489
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THE INDEPENDENT

Today we publish the latest results in our Independent Fantasy Football game, supported by Philips Energy Saver Light Bulbs.

The Team Market and Scores table published on Monday 9 December - Sunday 15 December inclusive. Column B lists all points scored before the transfer period. Column A lists all points scored after the transfer period. The Overall (Ov) column lists the total amount of points scored in all matches played from Saturday 17 August - Sunday 15 December.

Also published today is the Top 50 League table (see left). It lists the overall top scoring Independent

the Independent on Sunday. The overall Top 50 League table will be printed every Wednesday (except Christmas Day) and again on Sunday. Terms and conditions as previously published and are available upon request.

PRIZES

The overall winner at the end of the season will be the entrant who has scored more points than any other Independent Fantasy Football team in that time. The top 10 teams will be entered into the 1998 World Cup in France. The winner, plus 10 runners-up, will share all the action of a quarter-final and a semi-final of their choice, plus the final. In addition, the highest scoring team each month will win a pair of tickets to one of England's World Cup qualifying games at Wembley.

TEAM MARKET AND SCORES

OVERALL SCORE CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 17 AUGUST - 15 DECEMBER. WEEK 18 SCORE CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 9 - 15 DECEMBER									
CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS	VALUE	CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	POINTS	VALUE
W	B	A	Ov	(£m)	W	B	A	Ov	(£m)
300	Scamper	ARS	0	3.0	477	Buckold	LIV	0	20.0
301	Bondan	BLA	0	1.0	478	Stiles	ARS	0	4.0
302	Power	ARS	0	1.0	479	Hartman	DER	0	4.0
303	Shorrie	ARS	0	1.0	480	Verde (C)	MU	0	1.0
304	Haddock	ARS	0	1.0	481	Neve	MU	0	1.0
305	Opgraves	COV	0	2.0	482	Fallace	MU	0	1.0
306	Film	COV	0	2.0	483	Palmer	MU	0	1.0
307	Seematt	EVE	0	3.0	484	McIntyre	MU	0	

2015/12/24

market report / shares

Nervousness about Christmas trade shakes retailers

Taking Stock

Data Bank

FTSE 100
3979.6 -14.2
FTSE 250
4364.0 -7.2
FTSE 350
1977.3 -6.2
SEAQ VOLUME
888.9m shares,
32,986 bargains
Gilt Index
94.06 +0.02

Share spotlight



Judging by the crowded state of the country's high streets a bumper Christmas is in sight. But such thoughts did not win unanimous support in the stock market yesterday as retail shares retreated, with some dealers fretting about the array of pre-Christmas sales and reports that one retailer had expressed disappointment with the level of trade.

The Christmas unease was shrugged off by NatWest Securities. Analyst Sean Eddie described the reaction as "an attack of traditional Christmas nerves". Today's November retail sales figures were another unsettling influence. George Eddie felt trade was building up as expected and the UK would indulge in its best spending spree since 1988.

The cautious stance appeared to come from Benlalls, the department stores group. No comment was available from its main store at

Kingston-on-Thames but there was talk the more sobering Christmas tale had emerged during a meeting with analysts.

Next, as if to steady market anxiety, let it be known it would not engage in pre-Christmas price cuts and was trading well. In busy dealing terms it was down 15.5p, settling at 553p, off 9.5p.

Other leaders lower included Burton (3.25p to 149.25p); Argos (10p to 747.5p); and Dixons (6.5p to 533p). Benlalls was unchanged at 129.5p.

The rest of the market had an uneventful session with Footsie down 14.2 points at 3,979.6. Volume was swollen by tax-efficient bed and breakfast deals. Takeovers, real and rumoured, provided much of the action. Insurances remained the centre of attraction with Commercial Union again leading the charge, up 13p to 695p, another peak. General Accident put on 21p at 716.5p.



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

Among insurance brokers Willis Corroon gained 5p to 140.5p. The shares were 118p last month.

The bids which did arrive came from engineers Fairley and FKL. Fairley offered £51m for Burnfield, a quality control equipment group, and FKL followed its signalled interest with a £196m offer for building materials group Newman Tonks. Both offers were rejected. Burnfield moved up 36p to 136p against the 135p offer and Newman jumped 20.5p to 149.5p, around the bid level.

The 18 million Severn Trent share buy-back, conducted by HSBC James Capel and UBS,

left the price up 13.5p at 667.5p against the 675p buy-in. The action encouraged Thames Water 18p higher to 586.5p.

BSkyB, on the Government's digital rules, rose a further 29p to 518.5p and media group Pearson, ahead of a trading statement today, slipped 11.5p to 689.5p. Rank, another where a trading statement is expected, shaded 3.5p to 430p.

British Aerospace continued to shrug off the Boeing takeover, rising 19p to 1,155.5p. The feeling is the US deal could provoke a more competitive edge in Europe, particularly at BAe associate Airbus Industrie.

British Gas fell 6.5p to 223.5p. ABN Amro Hoare Govett, the company's stockbroker, cut its target price by 20p to 220p ahead of an investment presentation due tomorrow. Hoare also trimmed its Imperial Chemical Industries estimates, leaving the shares 6p lower at 767p.

Shell weakened 10p to 972p on worries about its Nigerian involvement and Llanva was little changed at 219.5p as Merrill Lynch posted a 250p target price.

Compass, the contract caterer, fell 8p to 612p. Accor, the French leisure giant, trimmed its shareholding by 6 million shares and rests with 21.53 per cent, approximately the level it intends to retain.

Sherwood, the clothing group, again had that threadbare look as its shares fell 17p to 41.5p on another profits warning. But Coats Viyella reversed an early fall to close

5p higher at 127p after a cautious trading statement was seen as less pessimistic than feared. The Sherwood setback ruffled Courtland's Textiles, off 10p at 221p.

Highams, a business services group floated at 72p on Monday, had another strong run, romping ahead 34p to 131.5p. Oxford Biomedica again strived to close the gap on its 88p placing price, moving ahead 5p to 55.5p.

Lanica Trust's remorseless progress seemed to gather pace; the shares surged a remarkable 172.5p to 1,150p after touching 1,200p. They were 56p in the summer, before Andrew Regan and friends acquired control. It has fixed up a mail order deal with the NAAFI and there is talk of links being established with Littlewoods. The behaviour of the shares should prompt the Stock Exchange to insist on a progress statement.

PGA European Tours, the old Union Square property company now building a spread of championship golf courses, is thought to be the bidder for struggling Club Partners International.

The target said talks were on with a bidder it did not identify which could lead to an offer of around 1p a share. Club Partners shares were put 5p lower to 5.5p. They were 33p in the summer but fell from around 14p when the company warned of a bid below the market level.

Bruntcliffe Aggregates held at 25.5p. The Bardon quarrying group, already with an option on 14.99 per cent of BA, has acquired an option on another 7.72 per cent and is seeking further options. Bardon's chief executive Peter Tom ruled out a full bid for Bruntcliffe.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 50 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items.

The Independent Index

The index allows you to access real-time share prices by phone from London Stock Exchange. Simply dial 0800 123 333, and when prompted to do so, enter the 4-digit code printed next to each share. To access the latest financial reports dial 0800 123 333 followed by one of the two-digit codes below.

FTSE 100 - Real-time	00	Starting Rates	04	Preparation Issues	36
UK Stock Market Report	01	Bullion Report	05	Water Shares	38
UK Company News	02	Wall St Report	06	Electricity Shares	39
Foreign Exchange	03	Tokyo Market	07	High Street Banks	40

Anyone with a tone-dial telephone can use the service. For a detailed description of the Independent Index, including its portfolio facility, phone 0800 123 333. For assistance, call our helpline 071 873 4378 (900am - 500pm).

Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume	Stock	Volume
British Gas	470000	Thom	230000	BT	100000	Volvo	80000
Shell	200000	Coventry	100000	Grand Met	50000	Lloyds TSB	70000
Shell Transport	150000	Indochina	100000	BTM	80000	BSkyB	70000
British Gas	100000	Next	100000	Next	100000	Next	100000
Compass	100000	Plaxton	100000	Next	100000	Next	100000

FTSE 100 index hour by hour	11.00	12.00	13.00	14.00	15.00	16.00
Open	3979.6	down 14.2	down 14.2	down 14.2	down 14.2	down 14.2
Close	3979.6	down 14.2	down 14.2	down 14.2	down 14.2	down 14.2

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Rowell's problem is that the modern world hates anything complicated and does not know how to deal with qualifications

Sometimes I feel sorry for Jack Rowell. I try to put the feeling behind me - to tell myself that no one made him take on the job of England manager - but somehow it creeps back. Rowell's trouble is that he is unsuited to the modern age of mass communications. This is not because he is a tremendous toff: though he went to Oxford, his roots lie in the north-east. Nor is he inarticulate: he is perfectly fluent, even if he does occasionally fall into management speak, which is not surprising in view of his background in Dalgety Foods.

He is an intelligent, a sensitive and, I suspect, a shy man. That is the trouble. The modern world hates anything complicated and does not know how to deal with qualifications. His predecessor, Geoff Cooke, got out of the difficulty by making things simple, even when they were not, and by treating his interlocutors with a certain genial contempt. Rowell is not like this.

He was, however, imprudent to commit himself too soon to Phil de Glanville as England captain. De Glanville is a fine centre, but Will Carling remains even better, while Jeremy Guscott is a great centre; putting him on the wing is a convenience, nothing more. Rowell has introduced two very good running full-backs in Tim Stimpson and Mike Catt. But if either is played, and Mike Catt dropped, who is to do the goal kicking?

I feel sorry for Catt as well. He has turned out to be the Graeme Hick of English rugby: the youthful prodigy from southern Africa who would, as soon as he is qualified for the English side, be a commanding influence for many years. As things have turned out, Catt will be lucky to be in the next England team. Alex King is that rare being in England, a natural outside half.

His Wasp colleague Andy Gomersall should be kept inside him. At the beginning of the season he was praised for being prepared; as Kyran Bracken was not, to embark on the odd frolic of his own. Today he is blamed for taking too much on himself. There is no justice in the world. There is certainly no consistency among critics.

We still do not know - this is hardly Rowell's fault - whether Adebayo Adebayo, Tony Underwood or they take the ball they are all standing still. Passes often land on the floor behind a centre or wing. Les Cusworth, one of the coaches, is reported to be "working on" this problem.

Taking the ball at speed used to be something most rugby players were taught at 14 or 15. I would bet that all the present members of the England back division were taught it also. Then the fashion started for the outside-half to take the ball lying flat and standing still, the better to cross the gain line. That was the theory anyway. When England try to apply it, the consequence is a completely stationary threequarter line.

All those who were critical of the front five's performance on Saturday should remember that those same players held and at times dominated the New Zealand Barbarians for a good two-thirds of the match two weeks previously. The problem remains in the back row. When, after that match, John Hart, the New Zealand manager, ventured to say that England had the "balance" wrong in the back row, I did not understand him to be saying that the unit should consist of Lawrence Dallaglio at No 6, Tim Rodber at No 8 and Chris Sheasby at No 7. This is the way some commentators have interpreted his remarks. But I understood him to mean the back row should be Dallaglio at No 6, Rodber, Sheasby, Ben Clarke or someone else at No 8 and someone else again at No 7.



ALAN WATKINS

someone else entirely is the best left wing available. I should certainly play Jonathan Callard at full-back for his kicking alone. The England back division would then be: J Callard; J Slightholme, J Guscott, W Carling, A N O'Leary, A King, A Gomersall. The backs' trouble is that when

Wembley primed for role on world stage

England's realistic chances of hosting three major sporting events early in the next millennium rose yesterday with the confirmation that Wembley will become the new National Stadium.

But Manchester, already committed to hosting the 2002 Commonwealth Games, will also have a new 60,000-seater stadium and a swimming venue.

The long-expected decision to choose the self-styled Venue of Legends rather than the Manchester bid was confirmed by the UK Sports Council chairman, Sir Rodney Walker. The decision appeared a formality after Wembley's endorsement in October by the Football Association, the Rugby Football League and the British Athletic Federation.

Wembley's legends, and its siting in the capital, are factors which have a deep significance among world sporting bodies. Plans will now go ahead to bid for the World Cup, the Olympics and athletics' world championships in the next century.

National Lottery funding will provide almost half of the cost of the planned £210 to £230m transformation of the most famous sporting site in the country, of which only the Twin Towers will remain of the present fabric. The Sports Council has said it will hold a competition for the redesign of the stadium, but Sir Norman Foster's futuristic design, which incorporates a retractable roof, is already linked with the successful bid, and has been favourably received. Work is due to start in 1998 with a target completion date of 2000.

Manchester's battered pride was soothed when Walker also announced that £60m would be made available to go towards the cost of the Commonwealth stadium. Manchester will also receive £20m towards a major new swimming complex.

The arrangement has raised optimism among British sporting administrators over attracting major events to these shores.

Graham Kelly, the Football Association's chief executive, said the chances of England hosting the World Cup in 10 years were now "very good indeed". He added: "We will be able to put together an excellent bid when the time comes in 1998 to put the finishing touches to it."

The first major world event at the new Wembley could come even sooner, with the BAF now preparing to make a formal application to stage the 2001 World Championships.



What Wembley Stadium may look like by the year 2000 - after it has undergone a £230m transformation

Strike threat by referees

A strike over pay by referees could put paid to this weekend's Welsh League programme. The Welsh Society of Rugby Union Referees is in dispute with the Welsh Rugby Union over the payment of match fees and has said its members will strike from this Saturday if the WRU does not back down.

The WRU has declined to attend a last-ditch meeting with the referees' representatives and wholesale fixture postponements look inevitable if members of the WSRUR go ahead with their planned move.

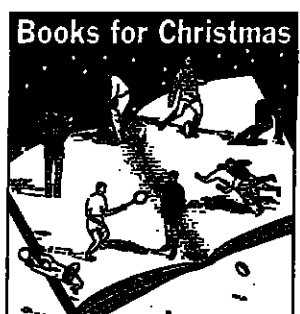
Referees officiating in the top five divisions want a fee, back-dated to 31 August, but the WRU is only prepared to pay First and Second Division referees back-dated to 1 December. The amount of the fee is also an issue, although the WRU had previously offered contracts, turned down because many officials have other jobs and could not sign a secondary deal.

"It is a very disappointing situation but there doesn't seem enough time left to solve this problem," the WSRUR secretary, Hugh Banfield, said.

A fulfilling tour around the University of Life

Clem Thomas was not the easiest man in the world to stop, as the whole of South Africa discovered in 1955 and sundry sports editors came to realise in the decades following his relocation from rugby pitch to rugby press-box. On his single Lions tour as a player 41 years ago, he was struck down by acute appendicitis yet missed only 10 matches. He was always one to see things through and this book, published, posthumously, proves the point.

The *History of the British Lions* (Mainstream, £15.99) was an appropriate subject for Thomas to tackle towards the end of his life for all rugby institutions, the Lions were closest to his heart. Why? Because that journey to South Africa under Robin Thompson was one of the defining episodes of his adulthood; as he says in his vivid account of the trip, he and his colleagues returned home "finer players and better men for such an amazing and fulfilling experience. We had enjoyed a crash course in the University of Life."



Chris Hewett on some good reads from the world of rugby union

to see how either Corrigan or Davies could have handled the task more capably.

Such a hyperactive bundle of burning energy during his Union heyday in the mid-1980s, Davies emerges as a surprisingly reflective human being, a truly great player who, for all the burning and gross hypocrisy confronted during his wanderings from 15-a-side to 13-a-side and back, have succeeded in extinguishing his anger and developing in its place a cool sense of perspective.

Code Breaker gives simple chronology a wide berth and, as a result, there is an unpredictable element encountered in all but the very best sports writing. Corrigan does the reader a service by flatly refusing to regurgitate endless torrents of dry statistical information; his job was to help Davies bare his soul rather than raid the record-books and he played the role to perfection.

The surprise package of the year was undoubtedly *Rugby: A Referee's Guide* (Collins Willow, £9.99) by Ed Morrison, an exceptional official but no poet, and his friend Derek Robinson, a novelist and broadcaster who also happens to know a ruck from a punch-up. The title is not exactly sexy, but the contents display a sharp wit as well as a wholly admirable determination to explain the whys and wherefores of the rule-book without boring anyone to death.

Forget Cliff Brittle, Sir John Hall and Rupert Murdoch for a moment. English rugby - indeed, rugby worldwide - was built on the backs of men like Morrison, uncomplicated and selfless sorts who spend hour after unpaid hour making sure that their local club-mates have somewhere to change, somewhere to play and somewhere to drink every Saturday afternoon between September and May. He may have been the 1995 World Cup final referee, but Morrison still acts as a fixture secretary for Harlequins - Bristol Harlequins, that is, not the sponsored silver-spoon brigade from Twickenham.

Robinson's light touch with the pen brings out the earthy humour of the game. At the same time, he illuminates the darkest corners of the referee's psychology by cleverly broadening a straightforward question-and-answer technique into a more sophisticated form of interrogation. Don't judge this one by its title.

Alex Spink's *Rugby Union Who's Who* (Collins Willow, £9.99) gets bigger and better with full coverage of events south of the Equator.

NOTICE OF VARIATION OF INTEREST RATES

With effect from 1 January 1997 Mortgage Rate will increase to 7.25% per annum for both existing and new borrowers.

The 100% Mortgage Rate will also increase to 7.75% per annum, along with the Royal Premier Mortgage Rate to 6.50%, with effect from this date.

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POOLS FIXTURES AND FORECASTS FOR 21 AND 22 DECEMBER	
Saturday 21 December	Sunday 22 December
FA Cup Round 1	FA Cup Round 1
1. Accrington v Bolton	1. Accrington v Bolton
2. Aldershot v Luton	2. Aldershot v Luton
3. Barnet v Brentford	3. Barnet v Brentford
4. Basingstoke v Exeter	4. Basingstoke v Exeter
5. Bournemouth v Colchester	5. Bournemouth v Colchester
6. Cambridge v Gillingham	6. Cambridge v Gillingham
7. Carlisle v Chester	7. Carlisle v Chester
8. Cheltenham v Hereford	8. Cheltenham v Hereford
9. Colchester v Gillingham	9. Colchester v Gillingham
10. Crewe v Notts	10. Crewe v Notts
11. Darlington v Grimsby	11. Darlington v Grimsby
12. Exeter v Bournemouth	12. Exeter v Bournemouth
13. Gillingham v Cambridge	13. Gillingham v Cambridge
14. Grimsby v Darlington	14. Grimsby v Darlington
15. Hereford v Cheltenham	15. Hereford v Cheltenham
16. Luton v Aldershot	16. Luton v Aldershot
17. Notts v Crewe	17. Notts v Crewe
18. Oxford v Reading	18. Oxford v Reading
19. Peterborough v Shrewsbury	19. Peterborough v Shrewsbury
20. Reading v Oxford	20. Reading v Oxford
21. Shrewsbury v Peterborough	21. Shrewsbury v Peterborough
22. Shrewsbury v Peterborough	22. Shrewsbury v Peterborough
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28. Shrewsbury v Peterborough	28. Shrewsbury v Peterborough
29. Shrewsbury v Peterborough	29. Shrewsbury v Peterborough
30. Shrewsbury v Peterborough	30. Shrewsbury v Peterborough

TODAY'S FIXTURES	
Football	Rugby Union
1. Accrington v Bolton	1. Accrington v Bolton
2. Aldershot v Luton	2. Aldershot v Luton
3. Barnet v Brentford	3. Barnet v Brentford
4. Basingstoke v Exeter	4. Basingstoke v Exeter
5. Bournemouth v Colchester	5. Bournemouth v Colchester
6. Cambridge v Gillingham	6. Cambridge v Gillingham
7. Carlisle v Chester	7. Carlisle v Chester
8. Cheltenham v Hereford	8. Cheltenham v Hereford
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10. Crewe v Notts	10. Crewe v Notts
11. Darlington v Grimsby	11. Darlington v Grimsby
12. Exeter v Bournemouth	12. Exeter v Bournemouth
13. Gillingham v Cambridge	13. Gillingham v Cambridge
14. Grimsby v Darlington	14. Grimsby v Darlington
15. Hereford v Cheltenham	15. Hereford v Cheltenham
16. Luton v Aldershot	16. Luton v Aldershot
17. Notts v Crewe	17. Notts v Crewe
18. Oxford v Reading	18. Oxford v Reading
19. Peterborough v Shrewsbury	19. Peterborough v Shrewsbury
20. Reading v Oxford	20. Reading v Oxford
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30. Shrewsbury v Peterborough	30. Shrewsbury v Peterborough

John 201520

Wembley in 2000
Mike Rowbottom on the £230m transformation, page 20

Alan Watkins
feels sorry for
Jack Rowell, page 20

Mansell rejects his comeback chance at Jordan

Motor racing
DERICK ALLSOP

Nigel Mansell has decided against making a return to Formula One with Jordan-Peugeot next season. The 43-year-old former world champion delivered his verdict yesterday, explaining he did not have enough time for the job.

Mansell, who tested for the team at Barcelona last week, said: "I thoroughly enjoyed the test and the professionalism and atmosphere of the team was as good as any I have worked with. Having seen their facility, and the 1997 car, I believe the team can enjoy success next season and become serious contenders."

"The idea of the test was originally to have some fun but my natural, competitive instinct took over, and a return to Formula One became a serious possibility. However, after consultations with my family and business advisers, I quickly came to realise that my schedule would not permit me to give sufficient time to the Jordan team and their sponsors."

It must be assumed Mansell was unconvinced about the potential of an alliance with Jordan, or that he was dissatisfied with their terms. He was seeking £5m to drive next year while Jordan were insisting on a performance-related deal.

Eddie Jordan, the team owner, said: "I believe Nigel can still be a winner, but I appreciate the honesty of his decision. The door will always be open for him at Jordan."

So it may still not be all over, but the chances of Mansell ever returning to Formula One now appear remote. This decision could prolong the grand prix career of another Englishman, Martin Brundle. The 37-year-old will also have to accept a pay-for-points scheme, although at lower rates than Mansell. Also in contention is the Italian Giancarlo Fisichella.

Motorsport's governing body, FIA, are mounting a concerted campaign to avert a boycott of racing in Italy, following the charges of manslaughter brought against Frank Williams and five others over the death of Ayrton Senna at Imola in 1994.

Williams have declared their intention to contest the charges and, in a statement yesterday, FIA said: "The best legal advice is that the six will be acquitted."

Ken Tyrrell has called for a meeting of fellow F1 team owners, while Flavio Briatore, the Italian managing director of Benetton, has already said his team will not race in Italy if charges are upheld. That message will doubtless be percolating through the corridors of political, commercial and sporting power in Italy, and the intervention of the FIA's president, Max Mosley, is designed to accelerate the process.

FIRST TEST: Silverwood in line for debut as England face the danger of defeat by their least experienced international opponents

Atherton tries to play down the pressure

DEREK PRINGLE
reports from Bulawayo

It is seven years since Michael Atherton first visited Zimbabwe with England A and announced himself as a Test captain in the waiting. Today, when he leads England against Zimbabwe for the first Test at Queen's Sports Club here, he will break Peter May's record of 35 consecutive Test appearances as captain. A cause for heavy celebration were it not for the knife-edge English cricket currently teeters on above the morass.

Of course, whether or not Atherton goes on to break May's all-time record of 41 Tests as captain, depends largely, if not entirely, on the outcome of this match. Win here and the series at least is safe. Lose and he will have to bear the consequences of precipitating English cricket into crisis.

Atherton, however, an admirably cussed fellow when the occasion suits, is having none of it, publicly refuting the symbolic magnitude of today's occasion. "Every Test match is important nowadays, none particularly more than others," he said at yesterday's press conference. "At the end of the day, it's a cricket match to be enjoyed and hopefully played well and we'll be doing our utmost to win."

As a rule, England tend to play their best and most inspired cricket when coming from behind - though it is usually when they are too far behind for it to have any bearing on a series. Just once, however, you would think they could get in a pre-emptive strike, particularly against the likes of Zimbabwe, a team whose patina of keenness is matched only by a tinge of greenness, at this level.

Damp behind the ears they may be, but Zimbabwe are really reared up for this encounter, claiming they would rather beat England than any-

one else. A situation Atherton, only half-joking, reckons is because of "Our imperial past, which everyone wants to kick us in the teeth for."

Empire, no doubt inspired the Churchillian speeches that David Lloyd uses as motivational aids, which presumably work for some. Yet, if ever there was a right time for the England captain to invoke the bulldog equivalent of Imran Khan's famous "fight like cornered tigers" speech, it is now. Incredibly, on that occasion Pakistan, who were on the verge of being eliminated from the 1992 World Cup, were transformed. And three inspired performances later, the trophy was theirs.

Unfortunately, England rarely play their cricket like that, which is why Zimbabwe may have the beating of them through a mental stalemate, with England's largely percentage players being out-percentage by an organised team on pitches too slow for percentage play. That is a situation certain individuals like Stewart, Knight, Hussain and Gough must now attempt to rise above and conquer.

Unlike Zimbabwe, England did not know their 11 last night. As they are picking only from 12, and the pitch looks brown and flat, they intend playing both spinners. The final bowling place being contested by Andy Caddick and Chris Silverwood.

According to Atherton, both have bowled well: surely something of a snap judgement, considering Silverwood's deeds have been restricted to a couple of one-day games, while Caddick, when returning for second and third spells, has more resembled a camel loping

into one of the hot dry harratans that blow off the Kalahari than an opening bowler with mayhem on his mind.

If Silverwood does make his Test debut, the 21-year-old Yorkshireman will be the youngest Englishman to do so since Somerset's Mark Lushwell in 1993. His subsequent fall from contention either serves as an appropriate example of poor selectorial judgement, or highlights the paucity of our first-class system. Perhaps it is both.

Interestingly, Zimbabwe claim to want to field first, should they win the toss, a tactic, they believe, will give their bowlers the best opportunity to be fresh for two innings. You cannot enforce the follow-on if you bat second and these days Test cricket (except when the Wimbledon final is on) has done away with rest days.

Unless it is complete kidology, or there are gremlins lodged secretly within the pitch, it sounds daff and it could play into England's hands, should the pitch wear with England

having posted a first-innings total of 400.

It would be just what Atherton's team needs, if only to detract from the management's fuzzy logic over bringing cover for Ronnie Irani. He has had his injured back injected and has been given a 10-day period to prove his bowling fitness in time for the second Test on 26 December, a match that Craig White, who flies in as Irani's cover on 23 December, may also be available for.

The options are stark, and with only 12 men to select from, England may subconsciously be giving themselves an excuse. If so, they are in serious danger of playing below their potential, and allowing Zimbabwe the recognition they crave.

So far this has been a curious and shambling trip. England, have supposedly never been fitter, but all the aqua training they did in the Algarve's swimming pools has done them little good in a land-locked country. If it were not for the

ENGLAND'S RECORD IN TEST TESTS

In the last 10 years England have never come back to win a series after losing the first Test. However, they have done so 10 times in the series when the victors in the opening Test.

AUSTRALIA 1986-87
First Test (Sydney): England 456 & 77-3; Australia 248 & 202
England won by seven wickets
England won series 2-1

PAKISTAN 1987-88
First Test (Lahore): England 175 & 230; Pakistan 202
Pakistan won by six wickets and 87 runs
England won series 3-0

NEW ZEALAND 1987-88
First Test (Christchurch): England 319 & 152; New Zealand 168 & 130-4
Match drawn

WEST INDIES 1988-89
First Test (Kingston, Jamaica): West Indies 164 & 240; England 364 & 41-2
England won by nine wickets
England lost series 2-3

AUSTRALIA 1989-91
First Test (Sydney): England 194 & 114; Australia 152 & 157-0
England lost by ten wickets
England lost series 3-0

NEW ZEALAND 1992-93
First Test (Christchurch): England 580; New Zealand 312 & 254
England won by an innings and four runs
England won series 2-0

INDIA 1992-93
First Test (Calcutta): India 371 & 82-2; England 163 & 288
India won by eight wickets
England lost series 3-0

SRI LANKA 1992-93
Only Test (Colombo): England 380 & 228; Sri Lanka 422 & 142-3
Sri Lanka won by five wickets
WEST INDIES 1993-94

First Test (Kingston, Jamaica): England 234 & 207; West Indies 407 & 5-2
West Indies won by eight wickets
England lost series 3-1

AUSTRALIA 1994-95
First Test (Sydney): Australia 428 & 245-8 dec; England 167 & 303
Australia won by 284 runs
England lost series 3-0

SOUTH AFRICA 1995-96
First Test (Durban): England 381-8; South Africa did not bat
Match drawn

England best series 3-0



Playing ball: Ian Botham, left, converses with Chris Silverwood during net practice in Bulawayo yesterday

Photograph: Clive Mason/Allsport

New boys anxious to make up for lost time

In all the kerfuffle over England's seemingly inexplicable start to their tour of Zimbabwe, the shortcomings of Mike Atherton's side have been unendingly analysed and dissected. At the same time, Zimbabwe seem to have been dismissed in almost patronising terms.

Zimbabwe are the newest recruits to Test cricket and, just like Sri Lanka before them, it has taken them time to find their feet at this level. Unsurprisingly, like Sri Lanka too, they have prospered more in the one-day game than in Test matches.

They have for some time been a force in limited-overs cricket. In the World Cup in England in 1984, for example, they beat Australia convincingly at Trent Bridge, and came close to beating India at Tunbridge Wells.

It is no secret that England voted against Zimbabwe's elevation to Test status in 1991, which underlines the irony of the present situation. There was a feeling in world cricket, however, that if Zimbabwe were not then made full members of

Zimbabwe must be taken seriously, says Henry Blofeld in Bulawayo

the International Cricket Council the game there might easily have withered and died.

It was a sort of last-chance season for them, therefore, but how well they have grasped this opportunity. The game flourishes although it is still very much a minority sport and is largely an elitist, white man's game. Apart from Henry Olonga, the fast bowler who is almost certain to play, the side for the first Test will be made up entirely of white players.

However, the next generation who are now at school are increasingly having the opportunity to play and, by all accounts, are jumping at the chance. If the West Indian example is anything to go by, as it surely must be, the composition of Zimbabwe's sides in 10 years or so should be very different.

In the meantime, cricket in

Zimbabwe, in spite of its limited recruitment base, prospers and undoubtedly the lure of international cricket has been one of the reasons. No one present at the Queen's Club on Sunday could have failed to have been impressed by the efficiency of their side, even if their batting faltered near the end.

Yet these players continue to be referred to patronisingly as "only" part-timers. Eddo Brandes is indeed a chicken farmer, Andy Waller a tobacco farmer, and Guy Whittall a big game hunter. This has been stressed to suggest they spend more of their time in gumboots with forks or guns in their hands than they do on the cricket field. That way, England's humiliation sounds the more dreadful.

But the fact is that this Zimbabwean side is an extremely professional outfit, not a collection of part-timers, and they are about to take Zimbabwe into their first Test Match against England, shamefully delayed by the old TCCB, with a real chance of victory. They must not be under-estimated.

Court dismisses referee's appeal

Rugby Union

The Court of Appeal's decision yesterday that a referee was to blame for crippling injuries suffered by the teenager Ben Smolton has widespread implications for rugby union.

The referee, Staffordshire official Michael Nolan, 54, had his appeal against an earlier High Court ruling dismissed. Smolton, now 22, will spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair after breaking his neck when a scrum collapsed during an under-19 colts

match between Sutton Coldfield and Burton more than five years ago. The High Court ruled last April that Nolan did not exercise reasonable care and skill in refereeing the scrums. Between 18 and 24 scrums collapsed at various stages of the game.

The RFU said the ruling had "extended the scope of potential liability for sporting officials, and this must have implications for the playing and refereeing of the game."

"The position would seem to be that, in the opinion of the Court, the standard of care ap-

plied by the officials controlling a game, for whatever reason, even inexperience, falls below the standard of care the Court deems appropriate, they may be held liable for any injuries which may result. Our first and foremost concern is for the safety of all participants in the game. This we shall continue to strive for to our utmost ability."

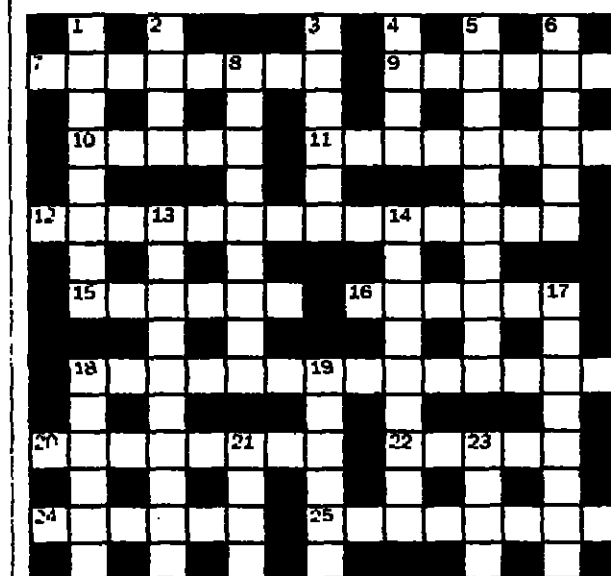
The court case has shown that refereeing a physical contact sport had now become a risky business in terms of insurance requirements and potential damages claims.

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

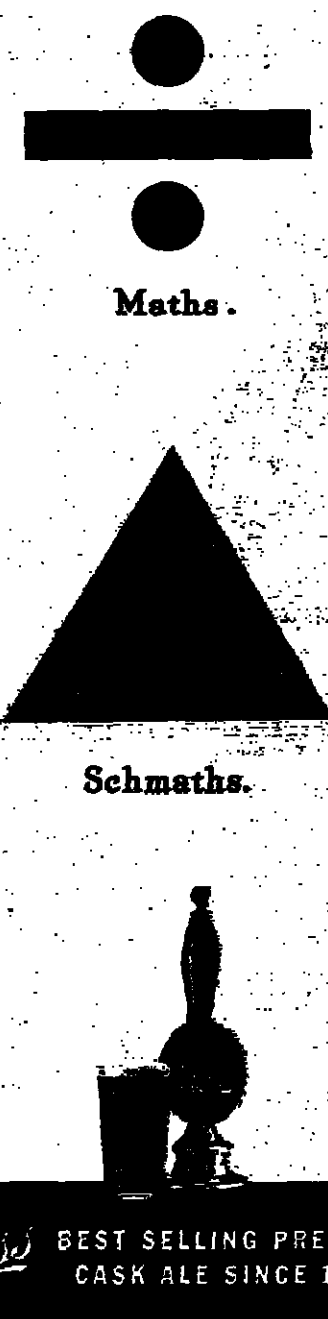
No. 3173, Wednesday 18 December

By Aquila

Thursdays Solution



- ACROSS**
- 1 None is not broken in scrup (8)
4 A French pair, for example, is a couple (6)
10 Type of stage for *An Ideal Husband*, say (5)
11 A light and trip in ground approach (8)
12 Injured, too lame to go off in play (5, 3, 6)
15 Hot drink for a man on board (6)
16 Butterfly aircraft (6)
18 Recovered from fever and excessive shaking (14)
20 Means of keeping rollers in (8)
22 Country needs honest man to lead (5)
24 Walked regularly in Dorset resort (6)
- DOWN**
- 1 In combat he makes a great sacrifice (8)
3 Draw almost set in motion (4)
5 Biased daughter supports crook (6)
7 High water for Jack Point (4)
9 Relations spot this blockage of artery (7-3)
6 Digs with a chunk of wood (6)
8 Republicans here sip orange cocktail (9)
13 Sitting on my father's land, making music (10)
14 Nucle, oddly, with clothing removed from middle (9)
- 17 Canon imprisons fellows in residential block (8)**
18 Narcotic consumed after evening work (6)
19 Twice-bitten Pecksniff girl? (6)
21 Carrying cargo, but not having left port (4)
23 Collaborator for a full year (4)



Handwritten text: 10/1/52